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BREAKING MAJORITY RULES:  
THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITIES AND  
CITIZENS IN BRITAIN AND INDIA

By

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This thesis is dedicated to the thousands of victims of the Gujarati pogroms of 2002 and my adorable nieces Hema and Ciara, whom I pray grow up in more secular and equal times.



## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

## Abstract

In this interdisciplinary thesis I will be arguing that new configurations of state discrimination have outrun the vocabularies of liberal multiculturalism and secularism. These 'majoritarianisms' are parasitic on the creeping foreclosure of secular spaces and identities from which emergent antiracist and antifascist struggles can be mounted.

State multiculturalism in Britain and India has been instrumental in fertilising the sectarian soil in which the secular has decomposed. They have patronised cultural separateness only to make capital from the isolation of ethnic blocs from mainstream society by expressing exasperation at the reluctance of minorities to 'integrate'.

The faith and ethnic communities consolidated under the multiculturalist 'management' of diversity have grown bereft of a political culture with which to interrogate the racist state. The privileging of cultural consciousness has been at the expense of political consciousness and an understanding of how discrimination cuts across cultural lines. The crisis of the secular is therefore simultaneously also a crisis of citizenship.

The thesis opens with chapters that draw on sociological research and political commentary to assess the differing forms of majoritarianism and crises of citizenship in Britain and India respectively. In the third chapter I approach these issues through the prism of postcolonial theory using Gayatri Spivak's rehabilitation of responsibility as a collective right (2003) to arrive at a contemporary expression of political education.

In the final two chapters I apply these principles to bring the multicultural and the secular into 'productive crisis' in Indian and British contexts by circumventing the orthodox divisions that characterise intellectual approaches to anti-racism and anti-fascism. I argue that there is a role for a modified understanding of multiculturalism in the recovery of the secular. I conclude therefore that renewing secular culture is predicated on the Left's ability to reaffirm the reciprocity between political consciousness, citizenship and struggles for racial, ethnic and religious equality.

# INTRODUCTION

## Scene 1: Oldham, Bradford and Burnley, Summer 2001

At the dawn of New Labour's second term, when they were returned to power with a daunting parliamentary majority, Britain was stunned by a cascade of civil unrest in its Northern towns. Even before the cataclysmic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> that year, multiculturalism had been battered and British tolerance towards minorities had stiffened. Though the 'race riots' have been eclipsed by the sensationalising implications of the so-called war on terror and receded from historical centre stage, they provided political capital for an assimilationist revival that has been unambiguously attributed to the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.

Britain was alerted to the latent violence in Oldham on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2001. Walter Chamberlain, a 76-year-old World War II veteran, was hospitalised after a savage beating at the hands of three Asian youths. He had been walking home after watching a local amateur rugby league match and was alleged to have breached the rules of Oldham's racialised cartography by entering a 'no-go' area for whites. He was set upon by the youths for an unauthorised incursion onto Asian territory.

The attack viscerally confirmed the emergence of a new social problem: minority racism. The rise to power of Asian racists, in particular, preoccupied the local media. Oldham's racial problems were stated to have been 'inspired' and 'perpetrated' by

Asians who were said to be 'be behind most racial violence'. Statistics were wheeled out to prove this disturbing fact: Oldham police logged 600 racist incidents in 2000, and in 60% of them, the victims were white. Of these 600, 180 were described as violent with the vast majority inflicted by Asian gangs of anywhere between 'six and twenty' on 'lone white males'.<sup>1</sup>

The attack on Chamberlain galvanised the National Front who held abortive attempts to march on three consecutive Saturdays. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, violence erupted between Asian youth and police in the Glodwick area. Though the police diverted the rioters away from town centre, there was serious collateral damage to business, cars and residential property. Pubs were firebombed and windows smashed; there were even allegations of an assault on an elderly Asian woman.

What happened in Oldham was repeated in Burnley and Bradford. Both Asian and white owned pubs were torched in Burnley, with many burnt out. BBC plans to interview British National Party (BNP) leader Nick Griffin in Burnley were dropped amidst the violence. Like *Oldham Chronicle* editor Jim Williams, Griffin was still afforded a BBC platform in a telephone interview on Radio 4's *Today* programme - to blame the violence on 'Asian thugs' for 'winding this up' by 'attacking innocent white people'. This contradicted the findings of an official report into the violence, which found that some of Burnley's white population had been 'influenced' by the BNP, and that Asian rioting took place in retaliation for an attack on an Asian taxi driver the preceding night. The report, entitled *Burnley Speaks, Who Listens?*,

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<sup>1</sup> David Ward, 'Ignorance, Misunderstanding and fear', *The Guardian*, Special Report: Race in Britain. Wednesday 12, 2001.



concluded that three nights of rioting was the result of machinations to elicit competition between rival criminal gangs into racial confrontation.

Bradford was the next town to fall, stung by violence over three nights in early July. Two people were stabbed, 36 arrested and 120 police officers injured during the first two nights, which mainly occurred in the predominantly Asian area of Manningham. On the third it subsided into a stand off between Asian youths and police.

No one in Bradford can complain about being unprepared though. The far right National Front and paramilitary Combat 18 had stalked the city for weeks preceding the general election, agitating in proxy for the BNP. And they had devised techniques to ratchet up the tension, honed in Oldham. While police were tied up with a rally composed of the main body of members, splinter groups would scamper to wreak havoc in Asian areas. The intention was to provoke Asian youth into retaliatory violence. If Oldham had become an 'open city', ripe for a bloody 'race war', Bradford was next in line. By the time the tension combusted into rioting, Asian youth had been worked into frenzy and they craved the opportunity for retribution. Stores of petrol bombs were collected and gangs coalesced. One such gang named itself Combat 786 – the numerical representation of Allah.

A report by Lord Herman Ousley, former head of the Commission for Racial Equality (written several weeks before the violence in Burnley or Bradford) criticised Bradford's leaders for failing to confront racial segregation, particularly in schools, which like Oldham, were either 99% white or 99% Muslim. He warned that the consequence of the authorities' inaction was a city in 'the grip of fear.'

A separate independent report into the Oldham disturbances accused the council of failing to act on 'deep seated' issues of segregation. It also blamed racial tension on insensitive and inadequate policing and an administrative power structure which failed to represent Asian communities. Only 2.6% of Oldham's council (the town's largest employer) were staffed by ethnic minorities. At a press conference announcing the report, its chair considered ethnic minority under-representation to be 'a form of institutional racism', evidence of an unwillingness to face realities.<sup>2</sup>

The riots fomented hostilities which broke new electoral ground for the far right. The BNP capitalised on crisis in the north-west, saving five deposits and picking up over 10% of the vote in three constituencies across Oldham. Its biggest success was delivered to its leader Nick Griffin, who gained over 16% of the vote in one seat. In another the BNP took over 11% of the poll off the back of an election campaign which encouraged voters to 'boycott Asian business.'

## Scene 2: Gujarat, Spring 2002

What happened in the western Indian state of Gujarat almost 12 months later was both more calculated and of a radically more barbaric order. In the words of Arundhati Roy, Gujarat was no less than the 'petri dish in which Hindu fascism has been fomenting an elaborate political experiment.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Arundhati Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2002).p.267.

Gujarat's communalisation began in earnest when the BJP assumed state power in 1998.<sup>4</sup> In its first year in power, in coordination with its extra parliamentary militia, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, the BJP began to poison relations between the majority Hindus and Gujarat's religious minorities. In the first half of 1998 alone, there were over forty recorded incidents of assaults on prayers halls, churches and Christian assemblies as a systematic attempt to terrorise Gujarat's Christian community was mounted. Baseless claims of Christianisation and the trafficking of Hindu girls to Asia's Islamic bloc were propagated by the agencies of the Sangh Parivar with the connivance of the Gujarati press.<sup>5</sup>

In January 2000 the BJP's paranoia was given legislative expression. A bill against religious conversion was proposed to the Gujarat state assembly, even though it directly contravened an article of the Indian constitution. Gujarat was the apogee of decimated secularism and feverish majoritarianism whipped up by an extremist state government. The hostility between Gujarat's increasingly vulnerable Muslims and its ideologically frenzied Hindus combusted on the Sabarmati Express at the religiously segregated town of Godhra on the morning of February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

On board the train were no less than 1700 *kar sevaks* or 'holy workers' returning from the proposed state of a Rama temple at Ayodhya – the spark for nationwide rioting ten years earlier. The area immediately beneath the railway station was populated by 'Ganchis'; largely uneducated and poor Muslims who were notorious participants in previous bouts of communal violence.

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<sup>4</sup> It remains the only major Indian state to be controlled by the BJP.

<sup>5</sup> 'Dateline Gujarat', Communalism Combat March/April 2002, available at <<http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2002/marapril/dateline.htm>> Accessed May 2002.



Alleged provocation from the *kar sevaks* (abuse of Ganchi vendors, the molestation and attempted abduction of a Muslim girl) resulted in a fracas on the platform between Ganchis and *sevaks*. But when the train pulled away fifteen to twenty minutes later, it was immediately halted when the emergency chain was pulled. A mob of 2,000 Ganchis had been hastily gathered from the immediate vicinity. They began pelting coaches S5 and S6 (speculation is that the offending *kar sevaks* were concentrated in those coaches) with firebombs and stones. S6 suffered the brunt of the missile attack: it was burnout with the carcasses of 58 passengers, including 26 women and 12 children. Most of the able-bodied *kar sevaks* are believed to have escaped either to adjacent coaches or out of the train altogether. Godhra's incendiary precedent set the genocidal tone for several days of calculated pogroms.

Sixteen of Gujarat's 24 districts were stricken by organised mob attacks between February March 28 and March 2<sup>nd</sup>, during which the genocide was concentrated.<sup>6</sup> They varied in size from between 5 and 10 thousand, armed with swords, *trishuls* (Hindu tridents) and agricultural instruments. While official government estimates of the dead speculated at 700 deaths, unofficial figures start at 2,000 and keep rising.<sup>7</sup> Incited by a communalised media and government which branded Muslims as terrorists, Hindus embarked on a four-day retaliatory massacre. Muslim homes, businesses and mosques were destroyed. Hundreds of Muslim women and girls were

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<sup>6</sup> 'Mapping the Violence', Communalism Combat March/April 2002, <<http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2002/marapril/dateline.htm>> Accessed May 2002.

<sup>7</sup> S.P. Shukla Dr Kamal Mitra Chenoy, K.S. Subramanian and Achin Vanaik, *Gujarat Carnage 2002: A Report to the Nation by an Independent Fact Finding Mission*, 2002, Outlookindia.com, Available: <<http://www.outlookindia.com/specialfeaturem.asp?fodname=20020411&fname=chenoy&sid=1>, April 2002> Accessed May 2002 .



gang raped and sexually mutilated before being burnt alive. The stomachs of pregnant women were scythed open and fetuses ripped out before them. When a six-year-old boy pleaded for water, he was made to forcibly ingest petrol instead. His mouth was prized open again to throw a lit match down his throat.

After consideration of all the available evidence at the time, an Independent Fact Finding Mission concluded that the mass provision of scarce resources (such as gas cylinders to explode Muslim property and trucks to transport them) indicated 'prior planning of some weeks'. In the context of that revelation, the Godhra incident was merely an excuse for an anti-Muslim pogrom conceived well in advance. The pattern of arson, mutilation and death by hacking was described by one report as 'chillingly similar' and suggestive of pre-meditated attack.<sup>8</sup> Dozens of eyewitnesses corroborate this theory, since many of the attacks followed an identical design. Truckloads of Hindu nationalists arrived clad in saffron uniforms, guided by computer generated lists of Muslim targets which allowed them to ransack, loot and pillage with precision even in Hindu-dominated areas.<sup>9</sup> The sheer speed of the genocide indicts Narendra Modi's BJP government. Without extensive state sanction (of which partisan policing has proven to be the thin edge) the violence could have been contained within the three days that Modi disingenuously claimed it had. In many cases, police were witnessed actually leading charges, providing covering fire for the rampaging mobs they were escorting.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Compounding Injustice: The Government's Failure to Redress Massacres in Gujarat*, 2003, Available: <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/India0703full.pdf>>, December 2003> Accessed January 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

It is also undeniable that Modi's and the BJP's reaction contributed to a climate of retribution. When asked about the retaliatory violence, Modi inanely echoed Rajiv Gandhi eighteen years earlier, quoting Newton's third law that 'every action has an equal and opposite reaction'.<sup>11</sup> He even commended Hindu Gujaratis on their restraint on February 28 – when the killing was at its most prolific and the rampage at its most devastating. Given Gujarat's anger at the events of Godhra he believed 'much worse was expected'. He later likened Muslim relief camps to 'baby making factories, promising to teach 'a lesson' to those 'who keep multiplying the population'.<sup>12</sup>

The pogrom drove over a hundred thousand Muslims into squalid makeshift refugee camps. Many of these were on the sites of Muslim graveyards, where the living slept side by side with the dead. The internally displaced were deprived of adequate and timely humanitarian assistance: sanitation, medical and food aid were in short supply in the supposed 'relief' camps. Non-governmental organisations, moreover, were denied access to redress the shortfalls of essential provisions. The systematic decimation of the Muslim community's economic basis was compounded by the emaciation of its surviving population.

The institutional failure to protect Muslim life did not end there. Despite immediate government boasts of thousands of arrests, many of those detained were subsequently released on bail, pending outstanding trials, acquitted or simply let

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<sup>11</sup> At the time of the Amritsar massacre, Gandhi declared that 'when a tree falls, the earth shakes'. *The Times of India*, March 3, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Modi was speaking at a press conference in Ahmedabad, Gujarat's capital, on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2002.

go.<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch (2003) research suggests that very few of those culpable for the genocide are in custody: the vast majority of those behind prison bars are either Dalits (untouchables), Muslims or *adivasis* (tribals). Modi retains ministerial control of Gujarat.

Muslims, on the other hand, have borne the brunt of the rule of law. Over a hundred Muslims implicated in the attack on the Sabarmati Express have been detained under the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), India's equivalent of Britain's new terror laws.

### Of communities and citizens

Weeks after the Gujarat massacre, at the Bangalore session of its annual convention, the RSS - the ideological father of the BJP and the 'moral and cultural guild' of its top brass - passed a resolution that unless minorities 'earn the goodwill of the majority community', their safety could not be guaranteed.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that they were the overwhelming victims of the carnage, or that it was they who were left intimidated, vulnerable and unprotected in its aftermath, the RSS believed that the burden of reconciliation and security should fall on Muslim shoulders.

In Britain, the political post mortem was equally swift and equally skewed. Within months of the disturbances, newly appointed home secretary David Blunkett had

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<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch.

<sup>14</sup> Narendra Modi, Lal Krishna Advani (the current leader of the BJP) and Atal Bihari Vajpayee (the former leader) were all reared by the RSS. Quoted in Arundhati Roy, 'The Modern Rationalist', April 2002, available at: <<http://www.themronline.com/200204m2.html>> Accessed May 2002.

categorically attributed the retaliations of British born, second generation Asian youth (actually to neo-fascist provocation) as the consequence of a poor facility with English and a failure to adopt British 'norms of acceptability'.<sup>15</sup> It was culturally inassimilable minorities who had 'failed' British society. Minority responsibilities assumed rhetorical centre stage in both instances.

By juxtaposing these incongruous episodes I am not trying to draw facile similarities between civil unrest and orchestrated genocide. Comparisons are grotesque given the disproportion between the incidents at Bradford, Burnley and Oldham and those at Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat.<sup>16</sup>

What both incidents indicated to me, across their disparate spaces, was a reflex of the (liberal and non-liberal) nation-state to demonise minorities as inassimilable communities and a disinclination to recognise them as citizens. The distinctions being drawn were between communities as illegitimate collective actors and citizens as individuals acting in the interests of the national good. Both cases, though through radically different degrees and dynamics, were expressions of actual or latent majoritarianism.

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<sup>15</sup> "We have norms of acceptability and those who come into our home - for that is what it is - should accept those norms just as we would have to do if we went elsewhere." David Blunkett, quoted in BBC News Online, 'Blair backs Blunkett on race', Monday 10 December 2001, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/1700370.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1700370.stm) Accessed January 2002.

<sup>16</sup> To spell out the obvious, there were no deaths reported in the summer riots of 2001; our two thousand are reliably estimated to have died in Gujarat. In England's race riots economic disadvantage is widely believed to have been a decisive factor, in Gujarat many of the perpetrators are well known to have been of middle class stock. Thirdly, there is compelling evidence that state authorities colluded with Hindu fundamentalist mobs in Gujarat; despite accusations of the police's failure to protect Asian communities, they stood off the rioters in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. And of course the tens of thousands of refugees left destitute and homeless in Gujarat was in no way foreshadowed in Britain.



They were particularly complex distinctions to be drawn at a time when community was being politicised in very different ways in Britain and India. In both cases, protection for minorities has been displaced by the aggrandisement of the majority community, circumscribed by conspicuously cultural parameters. The state's patronage of plural cultural communities has given way to the mandate for a single communitarian order: the seeds of majoritarianism.. The double focus of this latent majoritarianism balances the coercive imperative for minorities to disaggregate as individuals with the enactment of government strategies to heighten the boundaries of an imagined national *common culture*. As New Labour's white paper *Safe Havens: Secure Borders* (2002) makes plain, citizens should only tolerate newcomers if their own identities are 'secure'.<sup>17</sup> *Political* rights and responsibilities therefore correspond to individuals' positions either inside or outside these boundaries.

While Blairism has been premised on the bedrock of neighbourly communitarianism it had become increasingly anxious at the contradictions between secular and religious communities for social cohesion. Rather than address the causes of segregation in diverse conurbations like Bradford, Birmingham and Leicester, Britain's political centre has become increasingly strident in its displeasure with the failure of some minority groups to 'integrate'. A commonplace expression of this exasperation has been the description of non-integrated minorities as 'communities', a description that has been politically contorted from celebration (under multiculturalism) to condemnation (the new assimilationism).

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<sup>17</sup> The Home Office, *Secure Borders, Safe Heaven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* (London: The Stationery Office, 2002).

By figuring ethnic minorities as communities the British centre and Right has consciously avoided recognising individuals 'inside' these formations as citizens; on the contrary it has designated ethnic minorities as 'trainee Brits' at an earlier evolutionary stage of citizenship. Closeted within culturally impermeable communities, minority individuals are precluded from identification with the 'common good', a realisation of their identities as national citizens and their active participation in the aspirations of the nation.

The divestment of individuality from minorities has accentuated their *responsibilities* to the nation (even as their rights have been attenuated). Settled ethnic minorities have been placed under new obligations and expectations to be 'active citizens' to build on 'shared aims across ethnic groups', to avoid extremism and respect national values. The prevalence of the minority community has become the excuse under which citizenship has become more prescriptive and demanding than ever.

The Sangh Parivar's ideological movement has benefited more strategically from the opposition between the inassimilable community and the patriotic citizen. Hindutva rests on the assumption that India is a Hindu nation (more precisely a Hindu land with a view to becoming a Hindu nation) whose citizens are those who cherish it as their fatherland and their holy land.<sup>18</sup> As believers in the 'Hindu-ness' (as Hindutva translates into English) of the Indian nation its citizens form an 'integral' community on that basis. Despite differences between its limbs and organs, the body politic and social are all oriented towards the well being of the

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<sup>18</sup> V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (Bombay: V.D. Savarkar Prakashan: 1969) p.2.

whole. Religious minorities who refuse to accept India's Hindu genius cannot therefore be citizens; they are identified as communities external to the nation.

The Sangh Parivar's political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have long argued that the 'pseudo-secularism' of successive Congress 'comprador' governments has baited the Hindu majority by repeatedly pandering to religious minority communities. They have pointed to political opportunism that has created 'vote-banks' among religious minorities to be manipulated accorded to electoral calculations. But as much as governments have been condemned for exploitative politicking, the greater accusation is that Muslim communities have been able to act collectively – through block voting – to unfairly influence the democratic process, gain political advantage and optimise their communal power.

Muslim communities have also been harangued by the RSS and its executive organs for exercising patriarchal communitarianism: suppressing individual choices and forcing women to be veiled and housebound. By refusing contraception and failing to control family sizes they have been accused of draining India's resources with excessive population growth. Secularism's failures can also be explained by their intransigence and intolerance. Anti-modern and culturally backward, Indian Muslims are constructed 'as the source and the dislocation of the Indian nation', 'stunting the economic growth and dynamism of the country'.<sup>19</sup>

The Northern riots and the Gujarati pogroms were ugly eruptions that had been stoked in the hothouses of Hindu majoritarianism and British neo-assimilationism. They were the outward symptoms of a crisis in the constitutional, judicial and

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<sup>19</sup> T. .B. Hansen, 'Globalisation and Nationalist Imaginations: Hindutva's Promise of Equality through Difference', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 9, 1996 p.6113.

cultural principles of secularism and multiculturalism. The accommodation of minority groups through multiculturalist policies has put secularism into disrepute, if not outright crisis. Multiculturalism, in turn, has been pilloried as anathema to secular culture and the values of liberal democracy. As much as the respective states have sought to confer blame for this crisis onto the shoulders of racist scapegoats - minorities reified into troublesome communities - the more obvious the crisis has become. Minorities are incriminated not only for sheltering illiberal values and practices and failing to act as citizens in the interests of the national good, but in their social presence as communities for unravelling the very fabric of secular culture.

I will now look in closer detail at the configurations of majoritarianism that currently prevail and have prevailed in Britain and India respectively.

### **British majoritarianism**

Britain's regression from liberal multiculturalism to liberal assimilationism has, like India's degradation of secularism, been progressive, and propelled by a crisis of the Left. The British establishment's initial reluctance to allow Commonwealth immigration, despite the acute post-war shortages in the public sector, governed official and public attitudes to race relations until Roy Jenkins salutary (if overdetermined) intervention in 1967. Until then racism was understood as a peculiar form of xenophobia, the result of the archetypal dark-skinner stranger



disorientating the startled Anglo-Saxon population. The working assumption, as Jenny Bourne put it, was that 'familiarity would breed content'.<sup>20</sup>

It was not until Jenkins interjected with his vision of 'equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' that the face of race relations acquired liberal characteristics. Equal opportunity was treated with the soporifics of the Race Relations Acts of 1965 and 1968 that gravitated toward conciliation rather than prosecution. Racism was given renewed respectability with the 1968 Kenyan Asians Act, which barred the free entry to Britain of its citizens on the simple grounds that they were Asian. Exceptions were those with a parent or grandparent 'born, naturalised or adopted in the UK' – as presumably would be the case if they were born in geographically 'familial' places like Australia or New Zealand. Racism was further institutionalised in the state with the immigration Act of 1971 when all primary non-white immigration was stopped dead. The right to abode was restricted to commonwealth citizens of demonstrable Anglo-Saxon stock, known as 'partials'.

Given the impotence of the Race Relations legislation and the respectability afforded to racist discrimination with the new immigration acts, Jenkins multiculturalist vision was eventually distilled to the common sense that coloured people were likely to be just as disorientated by emigration as whites by immigration. The solution was to satisfy these ostensibly psychological needs by granting immigrants their own cultural spaces and institutions where they could cocoon themselves away from the alienating swirl of mainstream society.

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<sup>20</sup> Jenny Bourne, "The Life and Times of Institutional Racism," *Race & Class* 43.2 (2001).

If the state were willing to tolerate cultural diversity (however ambivalently that tolerance might be manifested) it was complacently hoped that this would drip feed through society. The public recognition of difference, rather than a hard line on racism, was the state's concession to liberals and immigrants.

Racism was concluded to be a matter of personal prejudice: a character trait to be weaned away by cultivating cultural respect. The logic of mainstream anti-racism was given full expression in the judicial inquiry into the Brixton riots of 1981, headed by Lord Scarman. Scarman rejected out of hand (and against the weight of evidence) accusations that institutional racism was prevalent in the Metropolitan police force. Though Scarman broke the news that racial 'discrimination' and 'disadvantage' continued to plague Britain's minorities, he offered no novel wisdom to challenge them.

His prescription was higher doses of political correctness and broader strategies towards moral antiracism. Racial awareness training (RAT) was intensively and enthusiastically undertaken throughout local authorities to weed out personal prejudice.

Scarman's recommendations were the furthest the Thatcherite establishment was willing to move in anti-racism directions during its three terms in power. Thatcher's diminution and inflation of state and personal responsibility was indicative of her policy towards racism and racial justice. Racism was not deemed to be a social problem, redressed by social action, but a matter of personal prejudice and perception to be resolved individually.

When New Labour ascended to power in 1997 it articulated an uneasy compromise between rhetoric of individual responsibility appropriated from Thatcherism (via the *New Times* project) and a longer standing Labour tradition of endorsing multiculturalism. What has become apparent over New Labour's two terms in power is that the cultural *laissez faire* of the multiculturalist regime is incommensurable with its other objectives. Though the empowering of communities sits very comfortably with New Labour's programme to devolve authority, the strengthening of communal segregation militates against its promise of social cohesion, considered to be the lynchpin of a sustainable welfare society and of law and order.<sup>21</sup> It has withdrawn from its early support for faith communities to take a more prescriptive view of the kinds of communities it wants to see, especially in Britain's most ethnically diverse cities. Though communitarianism was an early New Labour watchword it has now taken a more circumspect view of the role of faith and ethnic communities in promoting the kind of values it wants to promote as British values. The solution has been to sacrifice cultural diversity for integration. Race equality comes in a distant third behind those two 'Labour' priorities.

The shroud of assimilationism fell over Britain after the Cantle report into riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. It has become the government's gospel on what is euphemistically spun as 'community' relations. The new watchword is not 'equal opportunity' or even 'cultural diversity', but 'community cohesion'. Its influence is telling in the government's 2002 white paper on immigration, *Secure Borders: Safe Haven* (2002). Though affirming the commitment to accommodate immigrant

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<sup>21</sup> See the chapter on David Goodhart's 'The Discomfort of Strangers' for the former, and David Blunkett's white paper *Secure Borders: Safe Havens* (2002) for the latter.

identities, it hedges diversity 'with integration'. The term multiculturalism was dropped altogether from the government's proposals.

The recession of multiculturalism from liberal and conservative imaginaries has been superseded by the growth of a nationalist communitarianism. The culturalist door has been shown to swing both ways and its justification has now been reversed. While once Roy Jenkins' priority was to expose the white majority to minority cultures, David Blunkett's imperative was to school the Other into English civility. Immigrants and racialised others are patronisingly considered to be 'trainee brits' at various stages of evolution to fully formed citizenship.<sup>22</sup>

The result has been the politicisation of citizenship and the disturbing revival of a correlation between race and immigration (at least in public discourse: it's been ever present in immigration law since 1962). Interventions such as David Goodhart's 'The Discomfort of Strangers' (2004) have set a new baseline for public debate, just as Enoch Powell's had done in the 1960s. But Goodhart's position as a liberal, on the supposedly fairer side of the political divide, has given his comments something approaching common sense and heralded a point of political no-return. It has afforded greater latitude to those to his right (politically) and restricted the latitude of those on his left, making his critics appear more radical than they actually might be.

Symptoms of the new assimilationism pervade British society. The daily tabloid tirades against refugees relentlessly dominate public attitudes. Domestic policy on asylum has played its part too. As Jenny Bourne adroitly observes, the dispersal

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<sup>22</sup> Yasmin Alibahi Brown, quoted in David Faulkner, *Civil renewal, diversity and social capital in a multi-ethnic Britain* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2004)p.10.



system has marginalized refugees, while vouchers schemes have stigmatised them.<sup>23</sup>

The Conservative Party's cynical attempts to make the last general election a referendum on immigration are a barometer of the national mood.

'Managed migration' has brought in its train new policing strategies which don't address but exacerbate anxiety about Britain Muslims. The criminalisation of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, supposedly made permissible by the 2001 urban violence, has included racial profiling as part of anti-terrorist operations. Stop and search among young Asians is at record levels. Slight reforms to the criminal justice system have dramatically emaciated the legal safeguards available to ethnic minorities. The proposal to abolish the right of defendants to elect to be tried by jury for 'minor offences' - for which Asians and Afro-Caribbeans are disproportionately charged with thanks to higher incidences of stop and search – will have more of an adverse effect on ethnic minorities than white Britain. Being subjected to summary trial before magistrates, who are widely perceived to work in the interests of the police, will further shake an already frail confidence in the criminal system's ability (and will) to deliver real justice to Britain's ethnic minorities.<sup>24</sup>

Economically, disadvantages persistently race along racial and religious divisions. The palpable unease at the dilation of cultural enclaves throughout the country masks the uglier realities of urban ghettos stalked by economic inactivity and social immobility (Home Office figures estimate that almost 52% of Muslims are economically inactive). Residential segregation is as much about social exclusion as it is about cultural separation. The spectre of terrorism and the

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<sup>23</sup> Bourne, p.14.

<sup>24</sup> A.Sivanandan, 'Poverty is the New Black', *Race & Class*. 43(2) 2001, p.4.

governments ambivalence towards diversity has furnished racism with a new respectability, made real in the explosion of racially and religiously motivated attacks on mosques, gurdwaras and Asian owned businesses.<sup>25</sup>

### **Indian majoritarianism**

Indian discrimination is on the surface more ideological than Britain's but it is also institutional and structurally entrenched in similar ways. The social immobility that afflicts Britain's minorities is apparent here too, as are the correlations between cultural diversity and urban disorder (writ large as national degeneration) and the crisis in confidence of secularism and pluralism.

Modern India's birth at partition was founded on the tenets of the Nehruvian consensus – the principles of socialism, secularism, non-alignment, and the developmental state. Given the brutal ravages of Partition and the vulnerability of India's remaining Muslim population, secularism was crucial in safeguarding the citizenship rights of India's numerous minorities. Constitutional secularism was the backbone of an official state discourse which recognised India's diversity through linguistic rights, cultural rights for minorities, the funding of minority educational institutions and legal pluralism.

As many observers have argued though, the Nehruvian administration is culpable for failing to properly secularise public culture. While avowedly secular it made only fainthearted efforts to curtail 'obscurantist practices' which continue in the

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<sup>25</sup> See the Institute of Race Relations' News Network for a catalogue of racist violence since the London bombings of July 2005. Available at:  
<<http://www.irr.org.uk/2005/september/ha000016.html>>

public sphere, 'often with the open participation of public officials elected to uphold secular values'.<sup>26</sup> In practice, secularism has really existed only as the indigenised, profoundly Gandhian inflection *sarva dharma sambhava*. Under the regime of this variant secularism, the state is not mandated to abstain or disassociate entirely from religion, but to maintain an even-handed approach to all.

This unique take on of secularism has, despite Rajeev Bhargava's (2004) protestations otherwise, progressively debilitated the credibility of the Indian state.<sup>27</sup> This became especially obvious in the post Nehruvian vacuum, when Indira Gandhi's flirtations with communalism compounded her flirtations with authoritarianism in her desperation to retain power. Communalist electioneering was also a recurrent feature of her filial successor Rajiv Gandhi's tenure and he, like her, reaped the same sectarian harvest she had sown in his assassination in 1991.

In 2002, Gurcharan Das' *India Unbound* and Meera Nanda's *Breaking the Spell of Dharma* pronounced the death of the Nehruvian consensus, as well as throwing up a cluster of new images with which to identify twenty-first century India. While Nanda hits out at the demise of scientific secularism – the intellectual hallmark of Nehru's India - Das hails the achievements of middle class India, projecting millions to cross the poverty line in the next forty years. What's intriguing is the absent correspondence between the two narratives since neither work makes reference to the other's account of modern India. To my mind, it is imperative to read these two

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<sup>26</sup> Meera Nanda, *Breaking the Spell of Dharma: A Case for Indian Enlightenment* (New Delhi: ThreeEssaysPress, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Rajeev Bhargava, 'India's model: faith, secularism and democracy' *Open Democracy*, 3 November 2004. Available at: <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/content/articles/PDF/2204.pdf>> Accessed December 2004.

histories side by side because they unfurl the schizophrenia of India's contemporary character. The spirituality and poverty which India has projected around the world for so long are more complex and political than is commonly understood in the West, and there is a tight fit between them in the process of national reinvention which has taken place since the early 1990s.

As Jaffrelot (1996), Blom Hansen (1999) and Rajagopal (1999) have all commented, the salience of Hindutva coincided with the restructuring of the Indian economy in the image of the New Economic Policy (NEP), instituted by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh under the watchful instruction of the IMF and World Bank. Their 'rescue package' for Indian's debt-ridden economy was a succession of privatisations and deregulations that brought India into belated alignment with globalised neo-liberalism.

The net effect of the reforms has been a perceptible renunciation of welfare as a state concern - a clear abandonment of the premise of Nehru's developmental state - and the consolidation of elite and middle class power. The mushrooming presence of the 'new middle classes', the primary beneficiaries of the NEP, has compounded the Indian state's plunging disregard for poverty. The dissolution of 'license Raj' and the ascendancy of market freedom precipitated a boom in Indian consumerism which effectively defines the character of India's bold new demographic.<sup>28</sup> Das, the self-appointed spokesman for 'Middle India' has this to say about the new middle classes:

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<sup>28</sup> It is indicative of this that the India's National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCEAR) have substituted the term of the middle class for the 'consuming class'.



Thus we start off the twenty-first century with a dynamic and rapidly growing middle class which is pushing the politicians to liberalise and globalise. Its primary preoccupation is with a rising standard of living, with social mobility, and it is enthusiastically embracing consumerist values and lifestyles. Many in the new middle-class also embrace ethnicity and religious revival, a few even fundamentalism. It has been the main support of the Bharatiya Janata Party and has helped make it the largest political party in India. The majority, however, are too busy thinking of money and are not unduly exercised by politics or Hindu nationalism. Their young are aggressively taking to the world of knowledge. They instinctively understand that technology is working in our favour. Computers are daily reducing the cost of words, numbers, sights, and sounds. They are taking to software, media and entertainment as fish to water. Daler Mehndi and A.R. Rahman are their new music heroes, who have helped create a global fusion music which resonates with middle-class Indians on all the continents.<sup>29</sup>

The new middle classes have been suckled to maturity in a uniquely Hindu idiom which has saturated their experiences of consumerist modernity. The weekly screenings of the Hindu epics the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in the 1990s on Doordarshan, India's state run television channel (widely believed to be a result of

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<sup>29</sup>Gurcharan Das, *India Unbound: From Independence to the Global Information Age* (London: Profile, 2002), p.287.

intense lobbying by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad) completed an unlikely circuit of consumerism, communications technology, religion and nationalism. The unprecedented national dimensions of their popularity awakened long dormant stirrings of Hindu nationalism.<sup>30</sup>

The triumvirate wings of the Sangh Parivar who comprise the agencies of the Hindutva project capitalised on the bleeding of religiosity from private to public consciousness. The proto-fascist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (which roughly translates as the National Volunteer Corps) was established in the 1920s. Under the leadership of the Maharashtrian Keshav Baliram Hedgewar it eschewed political visibility in favour of underground status with a purpose to roll out Hindu India's leaders. As the translation suggests, it modelled itself on military training camps, and the achievement of martial prowess among its members was a key objective. Parallels to Mussolini's National Socialist drill centres have not gone unnoticed.<sup>31</sup> To this day, it is comprised of individual cells, known as *shakhas*, which are run on obsessively strict lines, enforcing discipline and adherence to a common code. The RSS recruits predominantly from the urban lower middle classes, from the shopkeeper classes, whose upward mobility is frustrated by societal bottlenecks, minority reservations in salaried positions and limited political influence.

After RSS ideologue Nathuram Godse's assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, the organisation was banned by Nehru's Congress government, despite

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<sup>30</sup> Rajiv Gandhi's relaxation of import duties on televisions during the 1980s, to celebrate India's hosting of the 1982 Commonwealth Games, was instrumental in the massive boom in television ownership during that decade, particularly since large numbers were remitted by Non Resident Indians (NRIs) resident in Dubai and the Middle East.

<sup>31</sup> Sabrang and The South Asia Citizens Web, *The Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRF and the American Funding of Hindutva* (2002). Available at: <<http://www.stopfundinghate.org/sacw>> Accessed January 2003.

Godse's protestation that he had no connection to it.<sup>32</sup> The RSS is insistent on its apolitical nature, and describes itself as a character-building, cultural institution. As a recent report shows, it does not have charity status either, and procures funds through its affiliation to charities which deny affiliation to the Sangh Combine, despite documentary evidence to the contrary.<sup>33</sup>

It was the VHP who led the movement to 'liberate' the *Ramjanmabhoomi* (birthplace of Rama) site in Ayodhya through the 1980s, L.K. Advani's *rath yathra* from Somnath to Ayodhya in 1990, which culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid by Hindutva's *kar sevaks* in 1992, and the spiral of violence that convulsed India for six months afterwards. Subsequent to the razing of the *masjid*, Narasimha Rao's Congress government banned the VHP for two years, and this was re-imposed once that elapsed (in 1995). The ban was barely enforced out of fear of driving the organisation to greater prestige underground, and VHP operations ran as visibly as before.

The VHP was set up in 1964 to promote Hindutva in a more open, modern and ultimately more aggressive way than could be achieved through the quasi-underground mechanisms of the RSS. Its earliest mission statement was 'in this age of competition and conflict, to think of, and organise the Hindu world, to save itself from the evil eyes of all three [the doctrines of Islam, Christianity and Communism]'.<sup>34</sup> Its rise has been instrumental in the renaissance of Hindu nationalism and its recovery from near obscurity in the 1960s and 1970s. Like the

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<sup>32</sup> This has recently been disproved through testimony from Godse's brother in 1948.

<sup>33</sup> Sabrang.

<sup>34</sup> *Organiser*, Deepavali Special, October 1964.

RSS it has set up mirror bodies abroad, with operations of the VHP and in the UK & US. It also possesses a paramilitary wing (*Bajrang Dal* or Lord Hanuman's Troopers) recruited from discontented urban youth. The VHP remain arguably the most influential of the Sangh Parivar and continue to exert a civil influence which should counsel caution in premature obituaries for Hindutva as a hegemonic project on the basis of the BJP's recent electoral demise.

The *Ramjanmabhoomi* catapulted the Bharatiya Janata Party (the VHP's sister organisation and the political façade of the Hindutva project) into government, briefly in 1998 and then for a lasting tenure from 1999 to 2004, as the majority member of the rickety National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The BJP were the first Hindu nationalist party to govern India, elected through a coalition of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). They were the most powerful of the NDA members in terms of parliamentary strength and the party's former leaders, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the outspoken deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani, were Prime Minister and deputy prime minister respectively. Both also rose through the cadres of the RSS, rendering transparent its role as a feeder to the BJP and the gelatinous relationship between the two organs of the Sangh Combine. Because of the nationwide rioting incited by the Sangh's agitation for the *Ramjanmabhoomi*, the Indian Supreme Court has circumscribed the ideological content of its election campaigns under the threat of disqualification of its candidates, though this has barely led to a moderation of its agenda.

The *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement aside, the BJP's accession to power emboldened the Sangh to pursue other means to 'Hinduize' the nation. Nanda narrates how the

most sophisticated technological advances have been credited to the expression of Hindu *dharma* and the glory of the Hindu *rashtra* (nation). In *Breaking the Spell of Dharma* (2002) she documents some of the attempts by the VHP to 'Hinduize' the nuclear test at Pokharan in 1998:

There is plenty of evidence for a distinctively Hindu packaging of the bomb (...) Shortly after the explosion, VHP ideologues inside and outside the government vowed to build a temple dedicated to Shakti (the goddess of energy) and Vigyan (science) at the site of the explosion. The temple was to celebrate the Vigyan of the Vedas, which, supposedly, contain all the science of nuclear fission and all the know-how for making bombs and much more (..) Plans were made to take the "consecrated soil" from the explosion site around the country for mass prayers and celebrations (...) the Hinduization of the bomb has continued in many ways: there are reports that in festivals around the country, the idols of Ganesh were made with the atomic orbits in place of a halo around his elephant-head. The 'atomic Ganeshas' apparently brought in good business. Other gods were cast as gun-toting soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

A disturbing example is the appearance of Vedic science in the educational curricula. In this case, another government agency, the University Grants Commission, has been promoting Vedic science as the equivalent of natural science. All this has led to a boom in the popularity of Vedic knowledge, to the extent of

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<sup>35</sup> Nanda, p.7.



warranting the staging of the first ever International Vedic Conference (held in Kerala in April 2002). At the conference university professors from around the country called for 'the teaching of Vedas to all'.<sup>36</sup> An article in the BJP's *Organiser* reported the following:

New courses in 'mind sciences' such as 'meditation, telepathy, rebirth and mind control' are being planned. *Archarya* Narendra Bhoosan, the Chairman of the organising committee and an authority in the Vedas and Sanskrit, delivering his presidential address said that the Vedas contained knowledge on many subjects like science, medicine, defence, democracy, etc, much before they were discovered in the West. He said that due to Western influence, India waited for the West to discover the wisdom she had with her for thousands of years. 'The conference (...) through a resolution (...) called for an establishment of Vedic departments in universities'.<sup>37</sup>

Bhoosan's pronouncements typify the consensus on the epistemological status of the Vedas in pro-Hindutva circles. The Vedas has become as singularly authoritative for Hindu chauvinists as the Bible and Qu'ran have been to Christians and Muslims. This is consistent with the 'semiticisation' of Hinduism where one *avatar* (Ram) and one dogma (the Vedas) have been elevated above all others.

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<sup>36</sup> S. Chandrasekar, 'Teaching of the Vedas to All' *Organiser*, April 15-21, 2002, p.225.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Other attempts have been made to rewrite Indian history textbooks, to encourage Hindu prayer in school and to plant Hindutva stooges in influential regulatory positions. The 'Hinduization of the bomb' and the equivalence of natural science with Vedic science are more than isolated instances of Hindutva's influence in the public sphere..<sup>38</sup> They are symptomatic of the growth of what Nanda terms a 'reactionary modernism' which has gripped the very middle classes Das takes so much pride in extolling as the future of India society:

'These mobs are only the visible signs of a large ideological counter-revolution that has been going on behind the scenes in schools, universities, research institutions, temples and yes, even in supposedly "progressive" new social movements, organising to protect the environment or defend the cultural rights of traditional communities against the presumed onslaught of Western cultural imperialism'.<sup>39</sup>

All in all, it has been no-holds barred, frontal assault on secularism: the communalisation of India. So deep have been the incursions, impressions and influences of the Sangh both on India's polity and society over the past fifteen years that despite Congress' recapture of power at the Centre, much conviction and innovation will be needed to reverse the 'saffronization' of India's individuals and

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<sup>38</sup> Such as Prasar Bharti (responsible for broadcasting).

<sup>39</sup> Chandrasekar., p.5.

institutions. Hindutva's insemination of India has been interrupted, not arrested.

Secularism is as much in crisis now as it was at the apex of BJP power.

It is critical to understand the disarticulation and disenfranchisement of minority citizens not only through transparent acts of discrimination but as a function of the reciprocity between cultural nationalism and neo-liberalism. While the NEP has been credited with the explosion of middle class growth it is also culpable for the hardening of poverty and the entrenchment of ghettos. There is a nexus between neo-liberalism and majoritarianism in the process of national reinvention which has taken place since the early 1990s.

India now spends less per capita on health than it did half a century ago. Public health services are on the verge of collapse while private hospitals flourish. Primary education, where India lags behind sections of sub-Saharan Africa, is beyond one third of its children. Elsewhere, an enlarged military budget has drained state funding for schools.<sup>40</sup>

In the absence of the Indian state's ability to make good on its constitutional obligations to millions of its citizens by providing them with the basic means with which to lead meaningful lives, a weak 'infra-citizenship' can be said to govern the relationship between two as political actors. The virtual invisibility of the poor to the state has impelled the consolidation of religious and caste 'communities' which are able to leverage their communal power for political influence. Over the past twenty

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<sup>40</sup> Praful Bidwai, 'World Social Forum: Dark Spots Come out in 'Shining India'', available <<http://www.ipsnews.net/interna.asp?idnews=21865>> Accessed 16 April 2004.



years, collective representation has become increasingly coextensive with the reification of religious and caste identities, with 'potent and violent' consequences.<sup>41</sup>

I will also argue that the NEP, by accentuating inequalities between structurally advantaged and disadvantaged religious and ethnic groups, has led to deteriorations in secular intersections between them. Ashutosh Varshney has suggested that even religiously diverse societies have proven to be 'riot-proof' because of high incidences of interdependence in working, political and recreational lives. The concentration of economic opportunities to culturally dominant groups has exacerbated the segregation between communities and deepened their isolation from each other. Communal identities have congealed where alternative, worldly identities have not been able to germinate in secular institutions of the school, the trade union or even through everyday contact.

### **Multiculturalism and anti-secularism**

If there are obvious incongruities between the prevailing forms of discrimination against minorities in Britain and India, there are equally obvious convergences between state and academic approaches to redressing discrimination by managing diversity.

Antiracist opinion on multiculturalism among is roughly reducible to two perspectives: those who perceive it to be a form of appeasement and those who see it as a form of struggle. Though multiculturalism is a heavily contested concept, it has

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<sup>41</sup> Chetan Bhatt, 'Democracy and Hindu Nationalism', *Democratization*.11, (4) August 2004, p.144.

become heavily associated in academia with communitarian advocates such as Bhikhu Parekh, and politically with the Statist rendering of multiculturalist policy, even if there are sharp divergences between the two.

Champions of multiculturalism would make capital from the distinction I've made above between its academic or theoretical imagining and the corruptions of its political realisation. Multiculturalists such as Parekh have a grand sense of multiculturalism as a human sensibility (what he calls the 'spirit of multiculturality') which cannot be politically compartmentalised as an antiracist strategy but which is intended to suffuse the broad spectrum of political decision-making.

Parekh's multiculturalism refuses to be reduced to an antiracist strategy even though it is ethnic minorities who are perceived to be the beneficiaries of multiculturalism policy. Parekh considers multiculturalism to have a global constituency because cultural diversity is 'a collective asset'.<sup>42</sup> He makes a case for the acceptance of cultural diversity as a legitimating, democratising energy for civil society and the polity.

His understanding of multiculturalism steers a moderating course between the excesses of liberal universalism on the one hand and those of cultural relativism on the other. Multiculturalism reflects his understanding that we are 'similar enough' to be 'intelligible' but different enough to be 'puzzling' and make 'dialogue necessary'.<sup>43</sup> The conclusions he reaches for conflicts in diverse society issue from this dialectic image of human nature since they demand non-'liberal' political

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<sup>42</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palsgrave, 2000) p.196.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.124.

virtues such as sensitivity, understanding compromise and patience, virtues which can only be forged through intercultural dialogue.

Parekh therefore makes a reluctant anti-racist and it's revealing that there is no sustained engagement with racism in his monograph *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000) (in fact its only fleetingly referred to in the context of communal libel). Even though he is more concerned with the overall reconciliation of justice with diversity, his recommendations on the political structures of multicultural societies, free speech and religion all err on the side of cultural and religious minorities. The coincidence between multiculturalism's theoretical prejudice towards minorities and the obvious minority bias of anti-racism goes a long way, I think, to explaining the conflation between two radically different if not incommensurable discourses.

Of course, practitioners of multiculturalist *policies* would insist that ethnic minorities are their predominant beneficiaries. To vindicate this claim they might cite benefits brought for the analysis of educational attainment, socio-economic status and health statistics by the debunking of catch-all ethnic categories. They would also (presumably) draw attention to the numerous cultural rights won for minorities: from headwear and cultural dress in workplaces to the proliferation of mosques, mandirs and gurdwaras and the establishment of religious minority schools. The commonplace appearances of minority culture in the national media and recognised taboos on racist language are further evidence of multiculturalism's transformation of British attitudes on race and cultural difference.

The problem is that multiculturalism as antiracist praxis is bereft of an adequate critique of *state* racism. It acknowledges that racism plagues society but cannot

accept that it is endemic to liberal societies or a compulsion of the capitalist system.

- It believes that cultural diversity has confounded the liberal order but also that this is a relatively novel situation and multicultural societies are on a steep learning curve. Multiculturalist polities are not born full formed but through greater intercultural knowledge can reform and evolve to more fairly reflect and serve multicultural societies. Since racism arises through cultural absolutism it can be cured with cultural dialogue; racists have misconceived ideas and attitudes about the Other which can only be unlearned by engaging with them on the basis of discursive equality and dignity. On the basis of its modest ambitions, it is fair to surmise that multiculturalism can never really go 'beyond liberalism' because it is premised on existing liberal culture and practices. Multiculturalism and liberalism are deeply implicated in each other, despite their superficial and constructed differences.

So even though multiculturalism has spectacularly fallen from favour at the political centre it is crucial not to overplay the ideological incompatibility between the two in practice. After all, liberal and multiculturalist policies have co-existed for the past thirty years and Parekh for one is too savvy to pretend that liberalism can be dispensed with entirely or that multiculturalism is an autonomous political doctrine. Parekh readily admits that the operations of multiculturalism, at least in the British context, are reliant on a liberal infrastructure.

Indian expressions of multiculturalism have been more hostile towards liberalism because of Indian society's general discomfiture with the principles of secularism that underwrite liberal ideas about justice and equality. The liberal accommodation of multiculturalism doesn't interfere with secularism because it refuses to accept that

religion and culture can be conflated. It makes a firm and intractable distinction between religion and societal culture.

India has never been able to work with the version of secularism found in Western constitutional models. Curiously for a nation renowned for its constitution, secularism was not incorporated into the Indian constitution until the mid- 1970s (and then under the instructions of Indira Gandhi, who has probably done more than anyone to bring it into disrepute). The variant of secularism she constitutionalised, and which has prevailed through most of India's national history, has been that of *sarva dharma sambhava*, which approximates to the understanding that the state has to keep a principled distance from all public or private religious institutions so that the values of peace, dignity, liberty and equality are not compromised. The Indian model acknowledges the religiosity of India's societal culture in its very articulation of secularism.

There are those (notably liberals, Marxists and rationalists), who would argue that Indian secularism has always been compromised by its concession to societal religiosity. Chetan Bhatt (2002) makes the point that 'equidistance' from all religions also implies 'equiproximity' to all religions and a state that consorts with religious groups is a state which invites accusations of bias, favouritism and corruption.<sup>44</sup> Others would go further to describe it as a constitutional loophole through which Hindu nationalism has been able to inseminate the political centre.

Others like Rajeev Bhargava would counter that *sarva dharma sambhava* is really only an application of multiculturalist ethics to the 'somewhat encrusted' formula of

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<sup>44</sup> Bhatt, p. 149.



secularism.<sup>45</sup> Parekh's conception of human beings as fundamentally similar yet simultaneously culturally embedded dictates that colour and culture-blind justice fails to take into account the culturally mediated differences between people. Neutrality may work in a homogenous society but fails in a diverse one. In other words, multiculturalists favour cultural particularism above abstraction. India's 'multiculturalist' secularism is governed by the same logic.

Firstly, recognition of the multiplicity of India's religions (and religious cultures) inheres in this model. The public character of religions is also affirmed even if the state declines to associate itself with another particular one. It also has a commitment to multiple values of liberty and equality existing in plural religious traditions to supplement more basic values for security and tolerance between 'communities'.<sup>46</sup> Indian secularism also practically approximates to Indian multiculturalism.

So, in principle at least, the India model seems capable of conciliating justice and (religious) diversity by recourse to multiculturalist ethics. It admits the difficulty of distinguishing between religion and culture and the political structure of multi-religious India seeks to take religious differences into account.

Despite Bhargava's confidence, this hasn't persuaded more hostile critics of secularism who challenge the ability of secular polities to allow the full expression of religiosity and traditional values. Their critiques incline further towards cultural relativism than Parekh's multiculturalism does and are fundamentally epistemological rather than ontological doctrines. Having said that, they also rest on

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<sup>45</sup> Bhargava.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



premises which are familiar to multiculturalism, particularly visible through their communitarian leanings.

‘Anti-secularism’ is by no means as coherent a political programme or doctrine as multiculturalism but it has attained formidable resonance as the name of an intellectual impulse on issues of minority equality, statehood and as a credible voice against religious nationalism and communal violence. Since it is so nebulous, contested and diffuse, I will only sketch its most salient characteristics to help explain why it cannot be reductively described as multiculturalism’s derivative distant cousin.

Anti-secularists commonly argue that the homogenisations of the nation-state have trampled on India’s native cultural resources for managing religious diversity. Despite their manifold differences they share the conviction that India’s traditional cultures should be foregrounded not ignored, and consequently that the rationalities of secular liberalism cannot speak to the religious inspiration of public ethics. Strains of anti secularism therefore regard the abstractions of liberalism, the nation state and the foundational concept of secularism as intellectual beachheads of British colonialism, a persistent form of cultural imperialism. Merryl Wynch Davies and Ziaddin Sardar (1990) have described a war on secularism as ‘a matter of cultural identity and survival for non-western societies’.<sup>47</sup>

Anti-secularists believe that Indian society bears the imprimatur of its religiosity in historically formed community formations. The interdependencies which sustain these traditional communities have been corroded by the rationalisations of the

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<sup>47</sup> Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair* (London: Grey Seal: 1990) p.32.

postcolonial state. The requirements of the 'masculinised modern state' have disfigured the Indian social landscape, attenuating communities through remote government.

Like multiculturalists, anti-secularists also take exception to what they perceive to be a liberal bias against these traditionally occurring communities and collectives. They argue that certain forms of community - predominantly cultural or religious - are not reducible to the individuals who comprise them but have distinct social personalities. Anti-secularists want the state to recognise communities as political actors in the same way that it recognises individuals.

Anti-secularists also believe that the erosion of indigenous social relations has catalysed communal tension. Ashis Nandy, for example, writing in a special issue of *Seminar* after the Gujarati pogrom, speculated on whether the spatial proximity of urbanised Gujarat could not be held accountable for the pogroms.<sup>48</sup> It is not only the bypassing of India's indigenous communities that anti-secularists are aggrieved by but also the declining socio-cultural currency of responsibilities and its usurpation by 'a language of unitary rights' which fails to cope with the 'respect for cultural diversity' and 'other ways of life'.<sup>49</sup>

It's this characteristic privileging of responsibility over rights, the valuing of the communal common good above individual sovereignty, that prompts Achin Vanaik (1997) to label anti-secularists as 'religious communitarians':

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<sup>48</sup> Ashis Nandy, 'Obituary of a Culture', *Seminar* 417 (2002)

<sup>49</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'Secularism and Tolerance,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (1994) p. 1227

Anti-secularists are religious communitarians who (like communalists and fundamentalists) see the relationship between individual and society as primarily based not on rights but on ‘moral responsibility’ and ‘consensus’ Though they are generally less hostile to issues of individual rights, both are programmatically unspecific about how personal freedom will be organised in their respective social utopias.<sup>50</sup>

Marxists like Sumit Sarkar (2000) likewise criticise anti-secularists for misguided resolutions to the questions of minority equality and anti fundamentalism. Sarkar accuses anti secularists of sharing discursive ‘spaces’ with Hindu fundamentalism and in so doing granting them intellectual legitimacy and respectability. The romanticised anti-secular whitewashing of traditional community echoes Hindutva’s own hierarchical authoritarianism, while claims for India’s exceptionalism rehearse its cardinal excuses from interrogation.

### **In the name of the secular**

In this thesis I will be arguing that new configurations of state discrimination have outrun the vocabularies of liberal multiculturalism and secularism. These new racisms are parasitic on the creeping foreclosure of secular spaces and identities from which emergent antiracist and antifascist struggles can be mounted.

State multiculturalism in Britain and India has been instrumental in fertilising the sectarian soil in which the secular has decomposed. These regimes’ incentives for

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<sup>50</sup> Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism* (London: Verso, 1997) p.179.

the reification of cultural and religious difference into collective identities regimes have abetted racist taxonomies of communities and citizens. The new configurations of state discrimination demonise minorities and the dispossessed as inassimilable communities who are unwilling to disaggregate into citizens acting towards the interests of the national good. These racist states have patronised cultural separateness only to make capital from the isolation of ethnic blocs from mainstream society by expressing exasperation at the reluctance of minorities to 'integrate'.

The faith and ethnic communities consolidated under the multiculturalist 'management' of diversity have grown bereft of a political culture with which to interrogate the racist state. The privileging of cultural consciousness has been at the expense of political consciousness and an understanding of how discrimination cuts across cultural lines. In other words, the formation of cultural community has been at the expense of political communities, unified by common struggle against human violation.

The crisis of the secular is therefore simultaneously also a crisis of citizenship. The effective disarticulation of minority individuals as citizens (through discriminatory disadvantages) has catalysed the inception of communities able to act as recognisable political actors. Renewing secular culture is therefore predicated on the Left's ability to reaffirm the reciprocity between political consciousness and citizenship. For minorities to make antiracist and antifascist interventions they must first arrive at a critical understanding of their own experiences, social structures and processes of social change. They must also be able to feel empowered by their status



as citizens, as bearers of human rights and not burdened by obligations to the cultural majority.

I argue that there is a role for a modified understanding of multiculturalism in the recovery of the secular. By sensitising abstract principles of political accountability (such as human rights) to the complexities of attachment and belonging, multiculturalist awareness can be mobilised to enrich the cultural matrix of the secular and activate interventions by minority citizens in the public sphere.

This corresponds to the 'multicultural political logic' that Stuart Hall (2001) recognises as a reforming pressure on liberal- constitutional models where in the 'expansion and radicalisation' of 'democratic practices in our social life' cultural identities are not necessarily attenuated in secular activities and struggles but actively engaged and transformed. It also dovetails with the 'dialogic communitarianism' proposed by Elizabeth Fraser and Nicola Lacey (1990) where individuals are able to cross and re-cross boundaries from one community to another.

## **Thesis map**

The thesis opens with chapters which draw on sociological research and political commentary to assess the differing forms of State discrimination and crises of citizenship in Britain and India respectively.

Chapter 1 analyses New Labour's assimilationist 'revaluing' of citizenship, which I argue arises out of the crucible of 'post multiculturalist' Britain. I investigate

the intellectual moorings of the post-multiculturalist consensus, including the influence of communitarianism on new strains of liberalism. David Goodhart's article 'The Discomfort of Strangers' (2004) exemplifies 'the progressive dilemma' which has united both liberals and conservatives in the anxiety for a common culture which has explicit majoritarian features.

Chapter 2 probes the congruence between the NEP and policies of economic neo-liberalism with the cultural nationalism of the Sangh Parivar. It argues that Hindutva is a cultural nationalism whose identity is ordered around that the culture of its social and economic elite. The congruity between Hindutva and the NEP illustrates to what extent they are compulsions of the same system in which the disenfranchisement or fractionally enfranchisement of national Others reinforces the hegemony of the cultural majority.

Chapter 3 establishes the theoretical premises on which my later analysis and conclusions are based. I seek to rehabilitate responsibility by rearticulating it as a collective right and in doing so reconcile the ethics of multiculturalism with the concept of political education. I examine orthodox presentations of responsibility as a community ethic, critically reading Amitai Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community* (1995) and the application of communitarian logic to the question of global obligations in Bhikhu Parekh's 'Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship' (2003). I go on to develop a politicised articulation of responsibility from Gayatri Spivak's 'Imperatives to Re-Imagine the Planet' (1999), and 'Righting Wrongs' (2003)

Chapter 4 examines how the Indian Left has theorised the overthrow of Hindutva's 'ideological counter revolution' and why this has faltered. It looks at the factors

underpinning the crisis of secularism including the factionalism of 'rights' and 'responsibility' based politics, contrasting texts from Ashis Nandy, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Aijaz Ahmad to illustrate the divisions between anti-secularist and Marxist strategies. I conclude by arguing that both positions either efface the global or the local and in so doing weaken the resources for Hindu nationalism to be challenged by citizen-actors.

The final chapter looks at the status of multiculturalism as establishment anti-racism in Britain. I examine the discontinuity between multiculturalist theory and policy using Bhikhu Parekh's seminal intervention *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000) as my core text. I begin by outlining the main strands of criticism of the text before debunking liberal opposition to multiculturalist implications and outlining some of the real failures of multiculturalism as policy. The remaining section of the essay looks to multiculturalism as possibility, arguing that it needs to be critically rescued from its conservative moorings in the service of more worldly appropriations of antiracism by ethnic minority citizens.

My conclusion cross-fertilises the insights from the previous chapters on Britain and India to construct a new secular imaginary where multiculturalism and secularism are brought into productive crisis. I end by proposing new avenues of intellectual work and political activism arising from the conclusions of the thesis.

## **After the Watershed: Post-Multiculturalism, Citizenship and the New Liberalism**

- ‘I propose that we reject the central image of ourselves as victims and install instead an alternative conception which sees us as an active force working in many different ways for our freedom from racial subordination.’ Paul Gilroy, ‘The End of Anti-Racism’ (1991)
- ‘People will always favour their own families and communities; it is the task of a realistic liberalism to strive for a definition of community that is wide enough to include people from many different backgrounds, without being so wide as to become meaningless.’ David Goodhart, ‘The Discomfort of Strangers ’ (2004)

Multiculturalism is fast becoming an anachronism. The evidence is in Trevor Phillips’ refusal to defend it against the onslaught of David Goodhart’s vision of monocultural Britain in ‘The Discomfort of Strangers’ (2004). The legacy of



racism, Phillips concurred, was 'entrenched segregation' and 'have a nice day racism'.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the last year (2004) the Commission of Racial Equality's own quarterly, *Connections*, hosted a panel of articles asking whether multiculturalism was now redundant. All but one (Tariq Modood's) considered it to be outmoded and incapable of meeting the challenges of contemporary racism.

The denunciation of multiculturalism has taken place at the same time as surveys reveal that one in three Britons openly harbour racial prejudice; at a time when immigration and asylum have become politicised more feverishly than at any time since the 1960s, and when the ruling Labour party – the preferred vote of ethnic minorities – now believes cultural differences undermine 'social cohesion' and 'newcomers' have a duty to integrate into the majority culture. If multiculturalism has been abandoned by both Left and Centre, what now?

In this chapter I discuss contemporary British debates around citizenship and its political refractions in those on anti-racism and human rights. I begin by retrospectively assessing the contribution of the *New Times/Race & Class* war of words and ideas on emergent anti-racist directions, particularly in terms of their differentiated articulations of rights and responsibilities. I then use these issues as the thematic prism through which to view the so-called 'return of assimilationism' (Solomos *et al*, 2002) in the guise of 'community cohesion' and 'revalued' citizenship. I argue that this new 'xeno-racism', exemplified by David Goodhart's article 'The Discomfort of Strangers' (2004) betrays the recession of

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor Phillips, 'Multiculturalism's Legacy is 'Have a Nice Day' Racism', *The Guardian*, Friday May 28, 2004, p.7.

multiculturalism in both liberal and conservative imaginaries, and its inadequacy for the Left's attempts to build anti-racist cultures.

I propose that the Left must propose an alternative conception of citizenship, presented in conjunction with the framework of the Human Rights Act to win back political initiative. I conclude by relating back to the points of exclusion between Hall's 'cultural politics' and Sivanandan's 'political culture'. I argue that advancing the debate involves grasping the innovative features of the 'New Times' socioscape that have undoubtedly emerged, and putting them to the use of self-determined anti-racism.

While much has been written on how the debates between *Race & Class* and *Marxism Today* stood in for larger, more vexed naval gazing among the academic Left about the 'renewal' of Marxism in the post-communist era, this has tended to overshadow the specifically national effect this had on the direction of anti-racism.

Since community anti-racism and Marxism has developed a close symbiosis both at the level of intellectual engagement and activism, it was inevitable that the shifts in the political culture of the latter would profoundly impact the former. Because British anti-racism had not developed a coherent political platform independent of socialism, its fortunes were tied to the larger movement. In other words, what *Marxism Today* had to say about Marxism had profound implications for civil society anti-racism.

On a different point, as Aijaz Ahmad (1999) has made plain, the stand taken by iconic black intellectuals like Stuart Hall 'mattered'.<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, how socialist like Sivanandan responded was critical in sculpting the future shapes of 'black'

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<sup>2</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, 'Out of the Dust of Idols,' *Race & Class* 41, no. 1/2 (1999) p.2.

activism. What also mattered was how racism itself had mutated as the forces of production had slipped into so-called post-Fordism and whether a 'renewed' or 'retained' socialism could provide an effective riposte.

Despite their antagonism to each other, both Sivanandan and Hall, the two totemic figures at the heart of the struggle, agree on 'a revolution in the productive forces' which has irrevocably reconfigured not only the balance of power between capital and labour, but also the character of class struggle. Even Sivanandan reluctantly concedes that the forms of political struggle associated with industrialism have become redundant today, conceding that the working class has 'lost its economic clout, and, with it, whatever political clout it had, whatever determinacy it could exercise in the political realm'.<sup>3</sup>

Hall similarly diagnoses the 'decline of the skilled, male, manual working class, and the feminisation of the workforce, the new international division of labour, and 'new forms of the spatial organisation of social processes' as symptomatic of the Thatcherite brave new world.<sup>4</sup>

Hall draws a deterministic line between the revolution in the production of forces and the conventional forms of collectivism which have been marshalled under the canopy of the working class:

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<sup>3</sup> A. Sivanandan, 'All That Melts into Air Is Solid: The Hokum of New Times,' *Race & Class* 31, no. 3 (1989).p.29.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Brave New World' *Marxism Today* October 1988, pp.24-29. Neil Lazarus (1991) accuses of 'presentism' in his depiction of New Times as a categorical break with the Fordist past. Lazarus contends that in his critiques of Thatcherism, Hall is guilty of attending to the singular and autonomous significance of developments at the 'local level' and a neglect of the integration of capitalism as a world system.' Neil Lazarus, 'Doubting the New World Order: Marxism, Realism, and the Claims of Postmodernist Social Theory,' *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3, no. 3 (1991).p.112.

The most visible of recent changes in class relations involve the genesis of a professional and managerial class and the expansion of surplus labour which appears in a number of contradictory forms, 'housewives', 'black youth', 'trainees', 'the middle class' and 'claimants.' This surplus population must be examined in its own right as a potential class in its relationships to other classes and class fractions. However, the novelty of the conditions we inhabit is not always appropriate to the relationship that these groups make with other new social forces within the labour movement.<sup>5</sup>

Sivanandan concurs that the new Thatcherite economy has brought about 'greater fragmentation and pluralism, the weakening of older collective solidarities and block identities and the emergence of new identities associated with greater work flexibility, the maximisation of individual choices through personal consumption.'<sup>6</sup>

Both Sivanandan and Hall agree (the former more reluctantly than the latter) on the need to relocate the locus of activism from the economic. But while Hall asserts that 'new times' has 'practically and theoretically' disintegrated any simple correspondence between the 'political and the economic', thus 'throwing the language of politics more over to the cultural side of the question', Sivanandan contests his deduction:

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<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, 'the Meaning of New Times', in *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, ed. Martin Jacques and Stuart Hall (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).p.28.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, cited in Sivanandan,p.6.



All the significant social and cultural changes that we are passing through today are similarly predicated on economic changes (...) the economic determines 'in the last instance still but shorn of its class determinacy (....) And this is what we moves the terrain of battle from the economic to the political, from the base to superstructure and *appears* to throw the language of politics over to the cultural side (...) The battle is the same as before – only it needs to be taken at the political/ideological level and not the economic/political level.<sup>7</sup>

This juxtaposition highlights that their diagnoses are very similar even though their prescription may differ. In Sivanandan's reckoning the 'collapse of class 'determinacy' merely shifts collectivist aspirations to the political arena. Hall disagrees: without a working class to marshal, 'new times' is the death knell for collective action and economic resistance. The style of post-Marxist resistance is individualist and cultural, 'new times' is the obituary of collective anti-racism. *Marxism Today* saw socialism's political redemption in the individual, not the community.

It therefore holds a critical, but not necessarily contradictory relationship with Thatcherite individualism. The imaginary of 'democratic citizenship' could well be conceived as the dialectical outcome of Thatcherite individualism and collectivist socialism; Hall considers both to undervalue 'new times'. Hall, Leadbeater, Jacques *et al* find commendable features in both, features worth emulating. It's not surprising

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<sup>7</sup> Sivanandan, p.8. Emphasis added.

that the *New Times* manifesto has been retrospectively heralded as New Labour's intellectual compass.

Though the *New Times* group predictably scolds Thatcherism for promoting a culture of self-aggrandisement and social irresponsibility this is tempered by a grudging recognition that it's better attuned to 'new times' than the political Left. It is not individualism itself that *Marxism Today* was opposed to, but the decomposition of society into individual interests. Charlie Leadbeater (1989):

'For Thatcherism, society becomes merely a meeting place for a plethora of individual wills, an area for individual satisfaction, a set of opportunities for individual achievement, advancement and enjoyment. Society is merely a tool and aid to help people achieve their pre-determined individual ends. People co-operate for purely instrumental reasons, to achieve their chosen ends more efficiently. Thus all allegiances to collective solutions become vulnerable to break-away. People are not encouraged to feel any sense of belonging or obligation to a wider collective.'<sup>8</sup>

Leadbeater sees in Thatcherite individualism the foreclosure of collectivism. In a society bereft of community spirit, atomised by a 'plethora' of uncoordinated 'individual wills', collective solutions are doomed to inevitable fracture by the prevalence of selfish interests. Rather than opposing individualism with collectivism in the fear of remaining 'trapped in a stale debate', the *New Times*

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<sup>8</sup> Charlie Leadbeter, 'Power to the People,' in *New Times* (see Hall above). p.142.

collective put forward an argument for 'putting individual interests at the centre of socialist strategy. They justify this through a comparison with Thatcherism which has succeeded 'by articulating a vision of how society should be organised which has individual morality at its centre.'<sup>9</sup>

What this entails is a compromise between 'radical individualism' and collective action.' It means an oxymoronic reconciliation between Left and Right, and the softening of hard Leftism to restore public belief in the ability of collective action to meet individual needs. According to Leadbeater, 'new times' asks for a socialism that will not restrain individualism, but successfully form reciprocity between individual achievement and the fulfilment of socialist aspirations:

It needs a socialist individualism at the core of its vision of how society should be organised. Socialists should not get trapped in a stale debate, in which they are painted as collectivists seeking to restrain Thatcherite individualists. They should not confine their case to the socially divisive consequences of Thatcherite individualism. They should confront it by directly offering an alternative progressive individualism.<sup>10</sup>

Socialist individualism is driven by a strong 'multiculturalist' impulse. In the demise of class determinacy - the 'theological guarantees' holding in place the correspondences between class and political identity - Hall saw possibilities to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.137.

democratise socialism. Behind the failure of socialism to adapt to the new times socio-scape has been the monopoly of Hall's figure of 'Socialist Man':

We cannot imagine socialism coming about any longer through that image of that single, singular subject we used to call Socialist Man. Socialist Man, with one mind, one set of interests, one project, is dead. And good riddance. Who needs 'him' now, with his investment in particular historical period, with 'his' particular sense of masculinity, shoring 'his' identity up in a particular set of familial relations, a particular kind of sexual identity? Who needs 'him' as the singular identity through which the great diversity of human beings and ethnic cultures in our world must enter the twenty-first century? This 'he' is dead: finished.<sup>11</sup>

Instead of political identities coalesced around familiar collectives – in trade unions, shopfloors and Labour party meetings – the New Times writers favour a devolution of political responsibility from time-honoured communities to ordinary citizens. These post-Marxists argued for socialism reflective of the cultural diversification of British society. Submitting all conflict to the banal antagonism

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).pp 169-70. Neil Lazarus (1991) takes offence at Hall's misrepresentative historiography of socialism. On the one hand, Hall 'degrades the past', writing with apparent indifference of the 'courageous struggles waged in the cause of Socialist Man by working men and – for all Hall's inference to the contrary – women over the course of the past one hundred fifty years or so'. This is he ventures, a consequence of 'submitting everything to the discipline of present reality'. Likewise, this presentism mars his representation of the present, which, in over-emphasising the pluralized nature of post-Fordist Britain, overlooks to what extent social relations in Britain still 'bespeak a 'traditional' class-divided capitalist society. 'Lazarus, 'Doubting the New World Order: Marxism, Realism, and the Claims of Postmodernist Social Theory.', p.112.



between the working class and the bourgeoisie perpetuates, in their view, a resolutely Eurocentric and masculinist perspective, bludgeoning all ethnic and gender difference under the Marxist hammer. Such a wilful denial of Britain's cultural diversity holds socialism complicit with the cultural racism staged so savagely by Thatcherism. By collapsing all oppressed consciousness into the colour and culture blind ideological bloc of the working class (the heroic figure of 'socialist man'), unreconstructed socialism banishes itself as an anachronism to political wastelands. By drawing on an awareness of other identities, on the other hand, the Left could put more people in the frame of political involvement.

Their progressive alternative was to make citizenship the crucible for individual responsibility and empowerment. This investment in citizenship is intended not only to advance the public recognition of difference but also to exploit emergent zones of political responsibility. Their appeal to a culture of 'individual citizenship' is projected as an antidote to 'individual consumerism', counter-weighting Thatcherism's surfeit of consumer rights with a call for 'people to carry responsibilities.' Leadbeater asks the Left's individualism to 'foster individuality, diversity and plurality in civil society.'<sup>12</sup>

They proposed that the idea of citizenship as an enlarged sense of personal responsibility would democratise socialism by presenting itself as a 'social individualism'. Instead of being wielded to wrench communities apart, the Left's social individualism would be used to write 'people's interdependence', 'their mutual obligations', into a public language of common rights, with the aim of repairing bonds of social cohesion withered by Thatcherite atomism. Their notion of

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<sup>12</sup> Leadbeter, 'Power to the People' p.148.

citizenship invests heavily in the values of independence. Expanding zones of responsibility correspondingly means enlarging the scope to act on it:

If the Left stands for one thing, it should be this: people taking more responsibility for all aspects of their lives. Whatever issue the Left confronts, its question should be this, 'How can people take more responsibility for shaping this situation, determining its outcome?' <sup>13</sup>

This multiculturalist, individualist socialism envisaged antiracism to be more effectively realised through the public recognition of diversity and plurality. That's why Rosalind Brunt (1989) claims that unless identity is at the heart of any transformative project, 'our politics won't make much headway beyond the Left's own political circles'.<sup>14</sup> Relaxing socialism's hostility to identity politics – what Brunt describes as closing the gap between the 'actual and potential political subject' - involves personalising politics.

The personalisation of politics, in turn, is believed to be made possible by the 'enormous expansion of civil society'. The diffuse and erudite modes of expression made possible by the civil social explosion has 'expanded the positionalities and identities available to ordinary people'.<sup>15</sup> The individual has been opened up to the 'transforming rhythms and forces of modern material life', and become politicised through an engagement with this material life, through an exposure to the politics of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.137.

<sup>14</sup> Rosalind Brunt, 'The Politics of Identity' New Times, p.150.

<sup>15</sup> Hall, 'the Meaning of New Times' p.129.

‘family, of health, of food, of sexuality, of the body.’<sup>16</sup> Hall argues that the adoption of certain modes of behaviour, of identification, position us politically at all times. Civil presence in the ‘landscape of popular pleasures’ is always a possible statement of *political* choice, potentially signifying dissent on any number of issues. The proliferation of diversity throughout civil society is presumed to continually undermine the marginalizing constructions of cultural racism by relativising all cultural identities to the ephemeral expanse of material life.

There is concession in his celebration though. The proliferation of new sites of social antagonism and resistance, the appearance of ‘new subjects and social movements’ cannot be manoeuvred into recognisable socialist positions, since they will not subordinate themselves before a ‘single and cohesive’ political will. Rather than coercively bending modern individuals into political shapes they would eventually reject, the Left should accept that personalised politics is the inevitable outcome of diversified social worlds, and adapt itself to this new reality.

As an antiracist strategy this translates into a whole-hearted embrace of multiculturalism. It requires unlearning the intuitive symbiosis of capital and racism by encouraging individuals to leave autonomous anti-racist imprints across civil society through choices in speech, dress and even consumption.

Sivanandan (1989) was less enthused by the personalisation of politics, and he holds it directly liable for the dissipation and discrediting of anti-racist energies in the 1980s. It is held responsible for exacerbating a crisis engineered by the state. It is perceived to have catalysed the black flight from community, the intellectual’s flight from class and the abdication of communal responsibility in the name of a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

counterfeit struggle that was being moved to higher, more democratic terrain.

. Responsibility for oneself superseded responsibility for the community:

The 'personal is political' has also had the effect of shifting the gravitational pull of black struggle from the community to the individual at a time when black was already breaking up into ethnics. It gave the individual an out not to take part in issues that affected the community: immigration raids, deportations, deaths in custody, racial violence, the rise of fascism as well as everyday things that concerned housing and schooling and plain existing. There was now another venue for politics: oneself, and another politics: of one's sexuality, ethnicity, gender – a politics of identity as opposed to a politics of identification.<sup>17</sup>

Sivanandan refutes 'social individualism' on the basis that socialism does not concern itself with the self-determination of the privileged and enfranchised, but of the disenfranchised and deprived. Their problems cannot be relieved by creative consumption, but addressed to the state through a struggle which can only be *collectively* sustained. A socialism defining its renewal through citizenship as individual responsibility would be socialism aping Thatcherism. Socialist responsibility, he argues, is always acted out in community: it is a responsibility to the least able to self-determine their existence. Social individualism is thus oxymoronic since it supposes individual fulfilment through independence and not

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<sup>17</sup> A. Sivanandan, p.15.



interdependence; quoting from *The German Ideology*, he reminds Leadbeater that Marx himself said that it was only in 'community with others' that the 'individual has the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions, only in community is personal freedom possible'.<sup>18</sup> Privileging the individual over the community is counter-intuitive to a genuinely socialist politics. 'While the personal is political may produce radical individualism, the personal is political produces a radical society'.<sup>19</sup>

Sivanandan therefore depicts the post-Marxism of *New Times* as a capitulation to Thatcherism, not its alternative. As advocates of personal politics, as cheerleaders of the 'astonishing return to ethnicity', Hall and the New Times collective are marching to a Thatcherite beat, wholly against the interests of anti-racism. Their promotion of ethnicism, under the general programme of 'social individualism', complements the efforts of successive governments to crush the militancy of the black community by encouraging balkanisation: the old colonial ruse of divide and rule.

Sivanandan traces ethnicism back to state multiculturalism. Born in the climate of liberalism in the late 1960s, multiculturalism was later institutionalised in the Community Relations Committee and the Race Relations Board among other government bodies. It was championed as a vehicle for Roy Jenkins' (1967) vision of integration as 'equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'. By the late 1970s and early 1980s it had rapidly degenerated into a corruptible and divisive force on black communities - especially those beset by the worst problems of urban deprivation. This led to inducements by local authorities (increasingly emasculated by central government) for ethnic groups

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p20.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p.28.

to fight for local resources, as independent parties, thus creating the 'deadly embrace of either pure competition, or at best, collaborative competition'.<sup>20</sup> Sivanandan:

Ethnicity was a tool to blunt the edge of black struggle, return 'black' to its constituent parts of Afro-Caribbean, Asian, African, Irish – and also, at the same time, allow the nascent black bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoisie really, to move up in the system. Ethnicity de-linked black struggle – separating the West Indian from the Asian, the working-class black from the middle-class black (...) Black, as a political colour, was finally broken down when government monies were used to fund community projects, destroying thereby the self-reliance and community cohesion that we had built up in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

According to Sivanandan, the advent of ethnicism presaged not only the demise of black political culture, but also the obituary of an anti-racist culture. As the anti-racist corollary of the personal is political, ethnicism personalises racism by training resources and energies on attitudes not outcomes. Ethnicism reflected the shift to multiculturalism as mainstream anti-racism and brought cultural responses to institutional racisms in its train. It retreats from what Alana Lentin (2004) describes as the 'state-centred critique of racism', developed out of the anti-colonial movement to a contest of opinions fought out on the hallowed democratic ground of

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<sup>20</sup> Ahmad, p.19.

<sup>21</sup> A.Sivanandan, 'Challenging racism: strategies for the 1980s', *Race & Class* 25:2 (1983) p.4.

civil society.<sup>22</sup> Racism was reduced to an inadequate representation of difference; attributable to little else besides cultural misunderstanding, a fight against prejudices, not institutions and practices.<sup>23</sup> Ethnic headcounts became the catch-all prescription for British racism.

Sivanandan compellingly proposes that anti-racist cultures are oxygenated by socialist values. An individualist anti-racism can never produce a socialist society because socialism is as much a culture as a programme. He argues that socialism begins and ends with identification with the oppressed, an imaginative empathy dramatically foreclosed by the inward looking nature of individualism. Socialist conscience does not necessarily arise directly from a personal experience of hardship, but the capacity to see in our own oppression the oppression of others. Socialism, in contradistinction to individualism, stimulates the cultural values of responsibility in community, unlike *New Times* self-determination whose moral compass gravitates towards the self. By politicising individual concerns it precludes universalising struggle, which the socialist fight against racism and poverty depends on. The individuation of political interest works inevitably to the exclusion of a collective agenda. The greatest liability a socialist challenge to racism is the privileging of a singular oppression above another, precisely what the personalisation of politics encourages.

Too much autonomy leads back into ourselves; we begin to home in on our cultures as though nothing else existed outside them. The whole

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<sup>22</sup> Alana Lentin, 'Racial States, Anti-Racist Responses', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 7:4, 2004, p.437.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.437.

purpose of knowing who we are is not to interpret the world, but to change it. We don't need a cultural identity for its own sake, but to make use of the positive aspects of our culture to forge correct alliances and fight the correct battles. Too much autonomy leads us to inward struggles, awareness problems, consciousness-raising and back again to the whole question of attitudes and prejudices.<sup>24</sup>

Both Sivanandan and Hall saw 'new times' as a window of opportunity for the Left to regroup after the setbacks of the 1980s. While Hall's *Marxism Today* saw signs of the redundancy of collectivism for contemporary socialism, Sivanandan's *Race & Class* read the challenge as one for collectivist rearguard action, despite the absence of ready-made class formations.

*Marxism Today* approaches 'new times' as a chance to renew socialism. The passing of class determinacy was not regarded mournfully in their quarters but positively seized to democratise socialism. This meant embracing innovative modes of political expression, most obviously through the expanses of civil society, redirecting individualism to socialist ends. They proposed to stage this by reclaiming the notion of citizenship. An inaugural socialist citizenship would challenge the universalising thrust inherent in its dominant construction. As Leadbeter claimed, 'Leftist individualism' would foster 'individuality, diversity and plurality in civil society.' Concurrently, it would be the vehicle through which individuals would be able to accept full responsibility for themselves, to autonomously shape their

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<sup>24</sup> A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (London: Verso, 1990), p.76.



existence. The Left's ability to deliver self-determination would be the new yardstick by which it would judge its legitimacy.

This remodelled citizenship would enshrine its 'double focus' – expanded equal rights and equal practices – through a constitution or bill of rights which set out the individual's power to determine outcomes. An expansion of rights by itself would be insufficient to meet the demands of social individualism without correspondingly expanding people's capability to determine outcomes: 'beyond those to cast a vote, but also to enjoy the conditions of political understanding, involvement in collective decision-making and setting of the political agenda which make the vote meaningful.'<sup>25</sup>

Sivanandan, and *Race & Class* under his stewardship, had other ideas about 'new times'. For them, 'new times' was not an opportunity, but a grave threat to a hard-won political culture which reinforced more strongly than ever the understanding 'that unity has to be forged and re-forged again and again'.<sup>26</sup> Sivanandan retorted that despite the disaggregation and dispersal of working class forces, socialism's constituency has enlarged even as it has been rendered invisible, excised from the popular consciousness and balkanised through the machinations of the state and the market. Sivanandan admits that by their 'very nature and location', the underclass are the 'most difficult to organise in the old sense of organisation'.<sup>27</sup> The imperative that arises from these 'new times' is not to capitulate to the individuation of political interest, but to form new movements and alliances. These challenges need to be made not in civil society but in direct confrontation to the state. These emergent

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<sup>25</sup> Stuart Hall and David Held, 'Citizens and Citizenship', *New Times* p.185.

<sup>26</sup> Sivanandan, 'All that melts', p.24.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p25.

communities of resistance 'have little sympathy with the ethics of the personal is political because this has tended in practice to personalise and fragment and close down struggles'.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than abandon the political culture of the working class movement for a palatable cultural politics subverted from Thatcherism, Sivanandan argued that these new movements can only be sustained by values and traditions inherited from older struggles: 'loyalty, comradeship, generosity, a sense of community and a feel for internationalism...and above all, a capacity for making other people's fights one's own – all the great and simple things that make us human'.<sup>29</sup>

David Goodhart's 'The Discomfort of Strangers' (2004) represents an even more critical shift away from the state centred critique of racism, but this time originating from liberal rather than socialist quarters. If *New Times* inaugurated socialism without a socialist constituency, then 'Discomfort of Strangers' heralds liberalism hostile to diversity. The relocation of the hard and centre Left to conservative ground has dealt a severe blow the cause of self-determined anti-racism.

His article is striking not for its controversial stance on multiculturalism and immigration, but for how unerringly it confirms the trajectory of liberal opinion and the xenophobic assumptions underlying it. Most of his policy prescriptions - citizenship initiatives above all - have already been proposed or enacted by the government.

It could be argued that Goodhart is only exaggerating Brian Barry's critique of multiculturalism in *Culture and Equality* (2001), to be discussed in a later chapter.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid, p.28.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, p.24.

Like Barry, who warns that ‘a politics of multiculturalism undermines a politics of redistribution’, Goodhart worries that a public favouring of diversity over solidarity challenges the basis of the welfare state.<sup>30</sup> The difference is that Barry does not discuss the merits of a multicultural society but the dangers of a multiculturalist *polity*. His concern is not whether multicultural societies undermine redistributive goals, but the incapacity of multiculturalist policy to redress the material inequalities that disadvantage poor black, white and Asian communities alike.<sup>31</sup> But while Barry refrains from explicitly connecting cultural diversity to immigration, Goodhart has no fear in making such a claim. This telling difference between Barry’s and Goodhart’s liberalism is directly attributable to a watershed in political attitudes to immigration and race relations which I propose to have taken place in 2001.

While Barry might be classified as an anti-multiculturalist liberal, I will suggest that Goodhart is more perceptively understood as a child of the times: he is a *post-multiculturalist*. He is the figurehead for a strain of avowedly progressive politics that has been given wings by a political climate born of the transatlantic war on terror and growing anxiety over inassimilable Muslims (especially in the northern towns). Their perspective has been shaped more by external events than internal

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<sup>30</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).p.8.

<sup>31</sup> Barry’s critique of multiculturalism shares features with its anti-racist critique. In common with the latter, Barry complains that it does nothing to change the structure of unequal opportunities, that it perpetuates these inequalities by mirroring those in the lower reaches of distribution system in internecine warfare, and that it diverts energies from more substantive issues of poverty and material deprivation. He of course diverges from anti-racist perspectives by refusing to recognise the racial weighting of these inequalities, referring to them only as ‘shared disadvantages’. His anti-racist politics would not bear too much dissimilarity to a politics of redistribution: the former would reliably result from the latter. Barry would therefore reject outright the contentions of Balibar (1991) and Goldberg (2002) that racism inheres in the democratic state.

reforms on the Left. Goodhart therefore depicts his quandary over the competition between solidarity and diversity as a 'progressive' rather than a personal dilemma, on whose axis the Left is expected to spin.

'The Discomfort of Strangers' begins with the premise that 'we' spend most of our lives 'among strangers'. Goodhart rejects historical revisionism that highlights the regional and economic stratifications of British society by arguing that they really did little to compromise the predictability of behaviour in everyday life. The post-war diversification of values, propelled by wealth and mobility and further catalysed by economically driven immigration from the Commonwealth and asylum driven immigration from Europe, Africa and the greater Middle East, has been noticeably disorientating. The 'visibility' of ethnic difference is an outward reminder that immigrants are 'initially at least, strangers'.<sup>32</sup> Goodhart evasively describes this as a cause of regret and disorientation to 'some', which they directly attribute with the 'growing incivility of modern urban life'.<sup>33</sup>

What makes this an issue for the Left is that welfare societies (such as Britain) compound co-existence and sharing with strangers. This sharing permeates every aspect of public life, from public spaces on mass transit systems through to incomes through the welfare state and public services. He argues that these commonplace acts of sharing are willingly undertaken if underwritten by a limited set of common values and assumptions: the very culture demanded by mutual obligation and attenuated by diversity in other words. The Left's 'recent love affair' with diversity has persuaded it to sidestep the issue, but the time, he tells us, may have come for

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<sup>32</sup> David Goodhart, 'The Discomfort of Strangers', *The Guardian* 24 February, 2004. Online at : <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/race/story/0,11374,1154684,00.html>> . Accessed 1 March 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



the Left to tackle an impending crisis. In his words, 'we need to be reassured that strangers, especially those from other countries, have the same idea of reciprocity as we do'.<sup>34</sup>

Goodhart legitimates the progressive dilemma through an argument for solidarity which echoes that made in Bhikhu Parekh's 'Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship' (2003). Like Parekh, Goodhart rejects the cosmopolitan (or 'liberal universalist') aspiration for obligation to all human beings by discrediting the implications of its application, and subsequently naturalising assertions of group identity.

As he sees it, the logical conclusions of liberal universalism are that 'we should spend as much on development aid as on the NHS', 'or that Britain should have no immigration controls at all'.<sup>35</sup> He believes, on the contrary, that the calculus of affinity obtains in all our social choices and human behaviour in general. Parekh likewise defends group obligations on utilitarian grounds - as special duties - a necessary division of labour through which the sum total of general duties could be 'discharged more efficiently'.<sup>36</sup> He also sees a moral hollowness in cosmopolitanism, since it neglects people's attachments to their communities and is too abstract to galvanise 'emotional and moral' commitment.

Goodhart conversely finds in-group identification to be harmless. Though he states conclusively that 'most of us prefer our own kind' (it is difficult to discern his

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, 'Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship', *Review of International Studies*, 29 (2003) p.6.

point of view from his representation of the Burkean perspective) he qualifies this in manifold ways:

The category 'own kind', or in-group, will set alarm bells ringing in the minds of many readers. So it is worth stressing what preferring our own kind does not mean, even for a Burkean. It does not mean that we are necessarily hostile to other kinds or that we cannot empathise with outsiders. (There are those who do dislike other kinds, but in Britain they seem to be quite a small minority.) In complex societies, most of us belong simultaneously to many in-groups - family, profession, class, hobby, locality, nation - and an ability to move with ease between groups is a sign of maturity. An in-group is not, except in the case of families, a natural or biological category and the people who are deemed to belong to it can change quickly.<sup>37</sup>

Modern liberal societies, in any case, cannot base themselves on a bold expression of group identity because the 'rule of law' and principles of 'equal legal treatment' militate against it (any theory of state racism would have something to say about that)<sup>38</sup>. The bottom line: the instinct to favour our own is both natural and defensible, corroborated by evolutionary psychology.

Though their arguments are headed in different directions – Parekh's towards a theory of global citizenship, Goodhart's towards national belonging - both are rooted

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<sup>37</sup> Goodhart.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

in unmistakeably communitarian foundations. Parekh's vision of a British 'community of communities', might outwardly appear incongruous to Goodhart's lament for a lost common culture, but the differences are only superficial. The latter's aspiration is communitarianism writ large: the spectre of majoritarianism. Despite its objections to the homogenous construction of British nationality, Parekh concedes necessary respect for Britain's 'operative public values', which all immigrant communities are expected to defer to.<sup>39</sup> Goodhart similarly expresses (on the behalf of 'poor whites') envy and not contempt for 'thick' solidarities found among ethnic minority groups who are 'recreating some of the mutual support and sense of community that was once a feature of British working-class life'.<sup>40</sup>

While Parekh seeks to preserve a sense of communitarian duty, Goodhart wants to inspire one. Their politics are mutually derived from beliefs about the inherent merit of cultural community and the expression of individual responsibility as obligation to the community. Goodhart's 'third way on identity' should not be distinguished from multiculturalism and coercive assimilationism (as he suggests) but recognised as a derivative blend of the two.<sup>41</sup> He wants a single communitarian order in Britain: a renewed appreciation of national community held in place by a publicly recognised culture of mutual obligation.

This increasingly comes into focus as the article progresses and Goodhart inscribes the indispensability of responsibility to the definition of a British

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<sup>39</sup> 'The operative public values of a society constitute the primary moral structure of its public life.' Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Palsgrave, 2000) p.269.

<sup>40</sup> Goodhart.

<sup>41</sup> This is not a politically moderating balance since they are both conservative in not so radically dissimilar ways.

community. Whereas Hall, Leadbeter and the other *New Times* writers saw the challenge to the Left as one of fostering individual responsibility, Goodhart - like New Labour – has come to realise the contradictions between self-government and communitarian responsibility. This has forced a displacement of responsibility as agency, as the ‘right to determine political outcomes’ for example, with responsibility as obligation and duty to the community; subordination to a sovereign power greater than the self.

Having been transformed by its ideological contest with Thatcherism, the centre Left has come round to thinking that the greater threat to its aspirations are posed not by a free wheeling market fundamentalism but by the phenomenon of cultural diversity. Goodhart complains that the Left’s failure to recognise such a threat, blinkered by its ‘love affair’ with it, has been its historical failure:

The left is reluctant to acknowledge a conflict between values it cherishes; it is ready to stress the erosion of community from ‘bad’ forms of diversity, such as market individualism, but not from ‘good’ forms of diversity, such as sexual freedom and immigration.<sup>42</sup>

Adopting *Marxism Today*’s agenda for the devolution of responsibility to the individual, broadly enacted through the establishment of regional development agencies and attempts to resuscitate local government, New Labour has found that multiculturalism has pulled it in contradictory directions. The *New Times* project, in its commitment to ethnicity and ‘putting identity at the heart of its transformatory

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

project', did not anticipate that the realities of multiculturalism - mutated into ethnicism - would be the biggest threat to individual responsibility.

The birth of 'ethnically defined fiefdoms' managed by a new class of community ambassadors who self-arrogated representative authority has been the legacy of multiculturalist policy. They did not foster individual empowerment as the *New Times* project had hoped, but became 'parallel cultural blocs' exempt from societal scrutiny. The interests of community leadership were actually invested in suppressing diversity, since their state authorised power depended on their legitimacy of their control over their members.<sup>43</sup>

It is against this backdrop of state sanctioned segregation that a foreboding attack of multiculturalism, masquerading under the moniker of liberalism's 'progressive dilemma', has dramatically eclipsed socialist critiques. In the Campaign Against Racism and Fundamentalism's (2002) review of the government's position, they discerned an acknowledgement that the preservation of separate, parallel cultural blocs is no longer considered a 'viable option':

Whereas before, black youths were assumed to be rioting because of a lack of culture (what was referred to as an 'ethnic disadvantage'), now youths were rioting because of an excess of culture – they were too Muslim, too traditional. For the state, the laissez-faire allowances of before had to be ended and cultural difference held on a tighter rein.

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<sup>43</sup> Kundnani, 'Death of Multiculturalism' *IRR News*, 1 April 2002. Online at <<http://www.irr.org.uk/2002/april/ak000001.html>>. Accessed 3 April 2002.



The 'parallel cultural bloc' was now seen as part of the problem, not the solution.<sup>44</sup>

As Back *et al* (2004) suggest, the civil unrest during the summer of 2001 in Britain's de-industrialised North have been an important factor in the drift away from a celebration of multicultural diversity.<sup>45</sup> Rolling back the cultural latitude afforded to south Asian communities over the decades (and in particular by Labour governments), the former home secretary David Blunkett publicly denounced 'forced marriages' and 'female circumcision', making further stipulations that arranged marriages should only take place between men and women resident in the UK. In the preface to his 2002 white paper, *Secure Borders: Safe Haven: Integration and Diversity in Modern Britain*, he explicitly relegates diversity to the interests of integration:

To enable integration to take place and to value the diversity it brings, we need to be secure within our sense of belonging and identity and therefore to be able to embrace those who come to the UK (...) Having a clear, workable and robust nationality and asylum system is the pre-requisite to building the security and trust that is needed. Without it, we

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Les Back, Michael Keith, Azra Kahn, Kalbir Shukra, and John Solomos, 'The Return of Assimilationism: Race, Multiculturalism and New Labour', *Sociology Research Online* 7 (2) (2004). Online at <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/2/back.html>>. Accessed January 2005.

cannot defeat those who would seek to stir up hate, intolerance and prejudice.<sup>46</sup>

Multiculturalist ethnicity has been emphatically indicted as the problem. The Cantle report was the official response to the 2001 riots and has become the definitive word on race relations management. In the words of Arun Kundnani (2002), 'the new strategy is "community cohesion" and the Cantle Report is the blueprint'.<sup>47</sup> In the report's opinion (by implication the government's) multiculturalism has erected cultural barriers to the desired goal of 'community cohesion'. Redressing that means striving to socialise immigrant groups (not just recent arrivals but also older troublesome ones, like the Yorkshire Pakistanis) in Britain civility.

Multiculturalist policy, as mainstream anti-racism, fertilises this kind of cultural racism. While outwardly striving towards the evolution of 'cultural mosaic' through liberal laissez faire, the failure of minorities to assimilate to the society proper elicits exasperation from the white majority.<sup>48</sup> The persistence of immigrant groups in thwarting 'social cohesion' feeds the far and New Right by perpetuating their 'identification as the problem'. Goodhart presents a similar case. Like the government, he specifies ethnic difference as the form of diversity most difficult to integrate into a culture of shared values:

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<sup>46</sup> David Blunkett, cited in Back *et al*, 2.2.

<sup>47</sup> Kundnani.

<sup>48</sup> Lentin, p.432.

The visibility of ethnic difference means that it often overshadows other forms of diversity. Changes in the ethnic composition of a city or neighbourhood can come to stand for the wider changes of modern life. (...) If welfare states demand that we pay into a common fund on which we can all draw at times of need, it is important that we feel that most people have made the same effort to be self-supporting and will not take advantage.<sup>49</sup>

The inference is that ethnically different newcomers (raising suspicions because of their 'different appearance') may not possess the same values of reciprocity as the settled population, who are presumably well socialised in such virtues. In turn, their perceived lack of mutual obligations induces faithlessness among the majority of the welfare state's capability to redistribute fairly. If newcomers are not believed to be 'self-supporting' (but reliant on others to support them) then this also ruins the climate for a culture of individual responsibility as instances of state dependency grow. To be reassured that 'strangers, especially those from older countries' believes in the same ideas as 'we do', their divergent views have to be flattened into agreement with a common culture. Only then can cultural barriers to cohesion be overcome and the twin aspirations of mutual obligation and individual responsibility flourish.

Goodhart wants public policy that 'tend to favour solidarity' to arrest the perceived degradation of cohesion. The 'idea' of a common culture should inform

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<sup>49</sup> Goodhart.

public policy as an 'underlying assumption'.<sup>50</sup> This preference should be expressed in three key areas: immigration and asylum, which need to be tightened and made more discriminating; welfare policy, where new immigrants would be subjected to the lower rung of a two-tier system with limited access to the welfare state; and culture, where immigrants are encouraged to 'become part of the British "we" '.

The focal point of Goodhart's recommendations is an emphasis on citizenship. He is in agreement with Hall and Held (1990) that citizenship can only be decisive for the Left if it is actively integrated with a set of related political ideas.<sup>51</sup> A culture of citizenship can both heighten the collective belief in a 'stakeholder society' and cohere diverse Britain around a set of agreed values. Whereas blood and soil national identities may be anachronistic for a globalised nation, citizenship is invested, by virtue of its legal origins, with greater inclusivity:

The modern idea of citizenship goes some way to accommodating the tension between solidarity and diversity. Citizenship is not an ethnic, blood-and-soil concept, but a more abstract political idea – implying equal legal, political and social rights (and duties) for people inhabiting a given national space.<sup>52</sup>

Citizenship is capable not only of transcending the narrow exclusivities of ethnic loyalty but also of expressing legal equality. It should not only convey abstract political status, but membership of a community that is not assumed but bestowed.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Hall & Held, p.175.

<sup>52</sup> Goodhart.

Citizenship also presupposes an acceptance of 'moral values, however fuzzy', and contractual obligations between the state and individual.

Existing measures to popularise the virtues of citizenship (such as in curricular education) should be augmented by playing up its 'symbolic aspects.' He proposes, for example, a 'British national holiday' or a 'British state of the union address' to reinforce the tacit understandings that (apparently) can no longer be taken for granted in society. He also makes a case for ID cards on the same logistical grounds as those already mooted by the Home Secretary (national security) but also as 'a badge of citizenship', presumably to be worn at all times with national pride.<sup>53</sup>

In another endorsement of New Labour proposals, he advocates substantial investment to facilitate cultural integration. To help achieve a 'British version of the old US melting pot', he wants schemes such as citizenship ceremonies, language lessons and the mentoring of new citizens. Newcomers are also encouraged to adopt British history with the intention of making the transition from 'immigrant "them"' to citizen "us"'.<sup>54</sup> The aspiration is inclusivity: the sacrifice is diversity.

But while Goodhart offers the benign solidarity of citizenship on one hand, he doesn't exactly abandon national culture either. Because while citizenship appears to promise reconciliation between diversity and solidarity, he says that a bland and abstract citizenship culture will make little headway in creating a sustainable shared culture. While citizenship creates a peer group of equals, unalloyed it doesn't get very far as an adhesive for national community. He predicts it to be very unlikely to inspire the kind of mutual obligations required to support a redistributive, equitable

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.



society. The political task facing the Left (or the progressive centre, whichever he might prefer to identify himself with) is to inscribe the contours of Britain's unique history and geography into the sterile language of citizenship:

The anxieties triggered by the asylum-seeker inflow into Britain now seem to be fading. But they are not just a media invention; a sharp economic downturn or a big inflow of east European workers after EU enlargement might easily call them up again. The progressive centre needs to think more clearly about these issues to avoid being engulfed by them. And to that end it must try to develop a new language in which to address the anxieties, one that transcends the thin and abstract language of universal rights on the one hand, and the defensive, nativist language of group identity on the other. Too often the language of liberal universalism that dominates public debate ignores the real affinities of place and people. These affinities are not obstacles to be overcome on the road to the good society; they are one of its foundation stones.<sup>55</sup>

Unless the Left is able to do that, to relate rights and duties to the broad and benign context of Britishness, then it will only create a nebulous sense of community, 'so wide as to become meaningless'.<sup>56</sup> Without an attempt at a culturally moderate definition of community then, the Right's populist clamour for a

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

coercive assimilationism, based on Anglo-Saxon ethnicity, is likely to gain ground.

Defusing the immigration time bomb is therefore a matter of urgency.

Goodhart claims that ‘negotiating the claims of solidarity and diversity is at the heart of politics’; by inference he also means that it is at heart of liberal politics. But in effect, he is doing nothing more progressive than rephrasing the well-worn conservative correlation between immigration and community relations in liberal terms. Goodhart’s progressive dilemma both consolidates liberalism’s rightward drift, consistent with the co-option of the Labour party to the centre-right, and the kind of presentist opportunism that Sivanandan accuses the *New Times* group of. Updating liberalism appears to entail an abdication of Leftist principles in pursuit of popularity. The fact that his argument self-consciously addresses ‘perceptions’ rather than ‘truths’ would seem to lend credibility to this assumption.<sup>57</sup>

What I’m arguing is that the recession of multiculturalism in liberal and conservative imaginaries has been offset by the growing appeal of a communitarianism that is nationalist rather than minority in expression. Kundnani’s (2002) indictment of Blairist multiculturalism’s compatibility with ‘anti-immigrant populism’ is thus explained by the collapse of pluralist into singular communitarianism at the progressive centre, or the emergence of the majoritarian reflex.

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<sup>57</sup> Goodhart’s qualifications overwhelm his entire argument. As he says, ‘attitudes to have, for many people, become more instrumental: I pay so much in, the state gives me this in return. As we grow richer, the ties that used to bind workers together in a risk-pooling welfare state (first locally, later nationally) have loosened - ‘generosity’ is more abstract and compulsory, a matter of enlightened self-interest rather than mutual obligation. Moreover, welfare is less redistributive than most people imagine - most of the tax paid out by citizens comes back to them in one form or another so the amount of the average person’s income going to someone they might consider undeserving is small.’ A better informed public - surely the bedrock of any worthwhile democracy - would appear to unravel the ‘progressive dilemma’.

The culturalist door has swung the other way, in other words. Liberal (that is mainstream) anti-racism is still resolutely culturalist, only the justification has been reversed. While the old orthodoxy sought to change majority attitudes to minority cultures, the new regime dictates that minorities must change their attitudes to show deference to the majority culture.

The return of assimilationist majoritarianism exemplifies a 'blame the victim' response that has afflicted public attitudes to minorities ever since the so-called war on terror (especially towards Muslims in the wake of the civil unrest in the Northern towns of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley during the summer of 2001). Rather than identify the cause as one of deprivation (racialised or otherwise) it has been misdiagnosed as one of 'too much culture', as opposed to 'too little culture', which was perceived to have caused the Tottenham and Brixton riots of 1981, and which precipitated the adoption of multiculturalism as its sovereign remedy. Arun Kundnani (2002):

According to the Cantle report, it is not so much institutions as attitudes that are the focus of change. Like its conceptual cousin, 'social exclusion', 'community cohesion' is about networks, identity and discourse, rather than poverty, inequality and power.<sup>58</sup>

Like all forms of racism, its new popular mutation perpetuates itself by stigmatising the immigrant as the problem to be solved; in this case by inculcating the righteousness of the native culture. Implicit in the new liberalism is a faith in the

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<sup>58</sup> Kundnani.

intrinsic virtuosity of majority British values. This is evident not in Goodhart's fears for the erosion of the British way of life, or even in the assumption that it is worth protecting, but in the insinuation that incoming cultural elements are polluting but not enriching. It is the kind of stealth 'racelessness' that David Goldberg describes with such economy in *The Racial State* (2002):

[Racelessness] is achieved only by the presumptive elevation of whiteness silently as the desirable standards, the teleological norms of civilised social life even as it seeks to erase the traces of exclusion necessary to its achievement along the way.<sup>59</sup>

This cultural racism pervades the liberal consensus on racism and multiculturalism. It would explain the incentives to cultural conformity Goodhart promises to the obedient immigrant. The carrot of citizenship is the primary bait, sweetened by other unspecified rewards.<sup>60</sup> Bundled together with this statement is an apparent endorsement of the existing dispersal policies to prevent immigrants from congealing into inassimilable blocs. Taken individually these are entirely reasonable suggestions which only assume insidious characteristics when contextually grasped as piecemeal aspects of a broader strategy which uses immigration to discipline minority communities (something which, as Kundnani remarks, has not been done by the political Left in almost thirty years).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) p.206.

<sup>60</sup> Goodhart.

<sup>61</sup> Kundnani.

The clamour to use citizenship to integrate ethnic minorities into a common culture of Anglocratic values therefore rests on mutually reinforcing, insincere and racist presumptions. Firstly, it assumes that immigrants outside an imagined developed bloc are democratically unskilled whereas those within this constructed zone of civility are model practitioners of liberal democracy. Goodhart's thinly-disguised identification with the latter group and disassociation from the immigrant point of view – no doubt a reflection of his natural affinity with 'his own' – is exemplified in the observation that 'it is not clear to many people why it is a good idea to welcome people from poor parts of the developing world who have little experience of urbanisation, secularism or western values'.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, by isolating immigrant culture as the ubiquitous problem, scape-goated in any crisis from community relations to the welfare state, it relieves the state of an imperative to interrogate its own institutionalised failings. By directing its worry toward the inassimilable immigrant, post-multiculturalist anti-racism exonerates popular and state racism from their role in creating inequalities (and the conflicts which consequently arise). The responsibility for cohesion rests with 'newcomers', a term racially loaded to index settlement status not from date of arrival but from racial or cultural difference (otherwise the scores of Australians and Canadians who annually enter Britain wouldn't be exempt from racist assumptions). By focussing on immigrant responsibilities and not rights, 'cohesion politics' excuses government and public culture from examining the deprivation of rights which occur under the auspices of institutional racism.

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<sup>62</sup> Goodhart.



In his comparison of citizenship initiatives, Will Kymlicka (2003) is critical of the unevenness of the British approach. In Northern American contexts citizenship has been relatively less controversial because it has been publicly (and consistently) distinguished from policy on immigration and multiculturalism even though they are acknowledged to be related. In Britain, by contrast, the configuration is politically electrified by a refusal to separate each aspect either in public discourse or legislation. Kymlicka figures immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism as a three-legged stool whose overall stability is contingent on each leg. Suspensions about the soundness of one leg imperil the other two: confidence in one can conversely reinforce the others. This is his metaphorical assessment of British reforms:

Britain has adopted the citizenship leg of the stool, but not the other two legs [immigration and multiculturalism], and the resulting package may be less stable, or at least more controversial.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, revaluing citizenship will inevitably benefit from a public commitment to genuine cultural diversity, and this cuts both ways. New Labour may succeed in pre-emptively containing the far Right by pandering to Middle Britain's illiberal opinions to these issues, but its current rhetoric on citizenship is unlikely to enlighten public attitudes on immigration and multiculturalism, let alone instigate the cultural understanding to take on racism in either its institutional or street faces. In the context of official attitudes to immigration, the Home Secretary's

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<sup>63</sup> Will Kymlicka, Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links, *Political Quarterly*, 74 (s1) p.204.

pronouncement that 'a rights and responsibilities culture really is our goal' has to be demystified to mean rights for white Britain and responsibilities for everyone else.

But if the liberal consensus has become officially post-multiculturalist, then it has only consolidated the anti-racist position against it. The analysis of state racism had gained credibility by a landmark ruling in 1999: the Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Its findings of institutional racism, together with the introduction of the Human Rights Act a year later, had moved anti-racists onto the front foot after almost two decades of reverses during which its 'end' had been forecast (memorably by Paul Gilroy). For the first time since the rise of Thatcherism, the new millennium augured the accountability of the state to the citizen, but the subsequent years have seen those hopes rhetorically and legislatively savaged.

'The Discomfort of Strangers' signifies a remarkable wresting of political initiative. But incredible as it seems now, things could and should have been a lot different. The state-centred critique of racism, abandoned by the New Times project (which itself became institutionalised in the machinery of New Labour) had the force with it as recently as 2001. At that time, as Jenny Bourne testified, 'never in British race relations history has there been so much interest in exposing and combating racism'.<sup>64</sup>

For the first time in an officially commissioned report, Macpherson openly stated the contingency of minority human rights to institutional responsibility. Deflecting critical attention away from criminalized black youth and towards the racist practices of those criminalizing them, it was a salutary reminder of institutional

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<sup>64</sup> Jenny Bourne, 'The Life and Times of Institutional Racism', *Race & Class* 43:2 (2001) p.13.

outcomes. It was a crucial blow to the mainstream currents that had hegemonised official thought since UNESCO's post-Holocaust separation of race and racial prejudice, and the subsequent elevation of culture as a marker of cultural difference.<sup>65</sup>

Here was a government sanctioned report – unlike the Runnymede commission on the future of multi-ethnic Britain – which explicitly connected the failures of multiculturalist policies with the persistence of racist public institutions. And this was the all-important difference: Macpherson redefined racism as a problem of institutional outcomes rather than individual prejudice. Individual prejudice would explain the casual, everyday instances of street racism which are often as brutal as they are ignorant, but prejudice outside public or corporate office does not produce discriminatory outcomes. And that is what racism is really all about: the exercise of prejudice in power. It is worth recalling Macpherson's definition of institutional racism:

For the purposes of our Inquiry the concept of institutional racism we apply consists of: The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through

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<sup>65</sup> Lentin, p.436.

unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.<sup>66</sup>

Though, his definition invites a conflation of individual and personal racism, as Sivanandan (2000), Bourne (2001) and others have rightly censured, his recommendations do crystallise a concern for outcomes and not intentions; his conclusion was one of the Metropolitan police force's collective failure not its collective prejudice.<sup>67</sup> This is certainly consistent with his recommendation for the full force of the 1976 Race Relations Act to be brought on the police, including provisions related to indirect discrimination which was defined as occurring 'irrespective of motive'.<sup>68</sup> It openly declared that the criminal justice system had failed black and Asian communities.

All government bodies were now brought into line with the Race Relations Act; the State was now accountable to law and by extension the citizen. Macpherson might not have enlarged the scope of individual rights, as the *New Times* project had sought as a condition of a socialist individualism, but it had eroded the impunity and immunity previously enjoyed by state agencies. Whereas official discourse had constructed black and Asian communities as unruly problems, (a characteristic also

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<sup>66</sup> The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report . chairman, Sir William Macpherson (London, Home Office, 1999) CM4262.

<sup>67</sup> 'While he correctly identifies an organisation's collective failure, i.e. its aggregate failure, its failure as a whole - as the crux of the problem, he fails to locate such failure in the structure, workings and culture of an organisation, which includes not only processes, behaviour, policies, practices and procedures; but also the organic relationship between this and the dynamics that that throws up. Instead, he attributes this collective failure, in part, to people's attitudes and behaviour. And by going on use words like 'unwitting prejudice' and 'thoughtlessness', he further compounds the confusion between personal and institutional racism.' Bourne, p.17.

<sup>68</sup> Bourne, p.18.

shared by new liberalism) Macpherson shifted the blame to those who had criminalized and demonised them, stating 'we are the problem'.<sup>69</sup>

But although the Macpherson report held out great promise for a revolution in anti-racism, and certainly put racial justice at the centre of the public agenda, its promise remains to be fulfilled. This is attributable to a number of contributory factors; for one, the reluctance of public bodies and local government to abandon outmoded anti-racist measures; for another, New Labour's introduction of contradictory legislation such as the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act which effectively racialised refugees; and lastly, the systemic shredding of the concept of institutional racism by right wing media and politicians (without noteworthy defence from the government or the so-called progressive centre).<sup>70</sup> The Institute for the Study of Civil Society's *Institutional Racism and the Police: Fact or Fiction* dismissed institutional racism as 'unprovable', while Melanie Phillips (then of the *Sunday Times*, now of the *Daily Mail*) caustically interpreted the definition to mean that it 'mysteriously floats about in structures, not persons, you can be racist and not know it'.<sup>71</sup> Macpherson's attempts to re-orientate the dynamics of anti-racist initiatives to acts instead of intentions were wilfully sabotaged by the Right, who refused to engage with the report's underlying premise that the aggregate of systematic and procedural racism was collective failure. William Hague contemptibly interpreted the definition as meaning that each and every policeman in the metropolitan force

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>70</sup> 'Dispersal, inevitably, has marginalized asylum seekers; vouchers have stigmatised them.' Ibid, p.8.

<sup>71</sup> Melanie Phillips, quoted in Bourne, p.12.



was racist.<sup>72</sup> Despite its substantial potential, the Macpherson report remains a promise that has yet to deliver.

The same could be said of the Human Rights Act. In many ways the Act aspired to work in hand in glove with the Macpherson report to corrode the untouchability of the criminal justice system. While Macpherson was obviously focused on the police force, the Human Rights Act attacked the credibility of common law as a whole. By the 1990s the claim that common law could adequately protect vulnerable communities, particularly with regard to police and immigration, had 'worn impossibly thin.'<sup>73</sup>

Abuse and forced confession in police detention were particular areas of indictment. Since the Act came into existence on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2000, anyone who believes that his or her human rights have been infringed by a public authority can bring a case to UK courts. In regard to anti-racism, the impact is likely to be greatest for issues of treatment in detention (prisons, police stations, mental hospitals and immigration detention centres). Under the umbrella European convention (which the Act was introduced to align Britain with) the 'State has primary responsibility for the welfare and safety of those in its custody.'<sup>74</sup>

The Act also paved the way for a public consensus based on 'agreed principles' rather than 'shared values.'<sup>75</sup> These would be agreed principles underwritten by supranational legal approval, familiar to all immigrants whether from the developed

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.13.

<sup>73</sup> Frances Webber, 'The Human Rights Act: a weapon against racism?', *Race & Class* 43 (2) (2001), p.83.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>75</sup> Yasmin Alibhai- Brown, 'The multicultural excuse', *Connections: Quarterly from the Commission for Racial Equality*, Winter 2004-5 p.42.

or developing world regardless of cultural difference. As a balanced configuration of rights and responsibilities, human rights discourse also meets the criteria for a language of citizenship.<sup>76</sup>

Robin Richardson (2001) argues that human rights discourse and race equality are reciprocally rewarding. On the one hand, a human rights framework gives anti-racism a higher profile and perhaps a less controversial and marginalized platform together with other issues around equality justice.<sup>77</sup> The history of race equality, on the other, can widen human rights currency with a 'sense of struggle' and a 'body of narrative, story and specificity', through the latter's inspiration of the American Civil Rights and the South African anti-apartheid movement, for example.

If the Lawrence inquiry alerted the public to the need for executive accountability, the Act endowed people with the means to do so. The police no longer have immunity from legal action and the provisions of the act empower those who suffer abuse or wrongful treatment to seek judicial redress. Since black, Asian and other immigrant communities are disproportionate victims of the criminal justice system, the Act should in principle be a powerful weapon against racism.

Like the Lawrence Inquiry though, the Act has been hobbled by New Labour's ambivalence and abuse. Kymlicka's metaphor of a three-legged stool is salutary here, since neither the Macpherson report nor the Act has been cohered into a unified programme either to expand people's rights or to curtail executive power.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Sarah Spencer, 'The Implications of the Human Rights Act for Citizenship Education', in Audrey Ousler (ed) *Citizenship and Democracy in Schools: Diversity, Identity, Equality* (Trentham: Stoke on Trent: 2000) p.23.

<sup>77</sup> The risk as Robin Richardson acknowledges, is that the anodyne vocabulary of human rights might suffocate the cultural vibrancy of anti-racism. Robin Richardson, 'Human Rights and Racial Justice', *Citizenship and Democracy* (see Spencer), p. 87.

<sup>78</sup> Webber, p.86.

When repeatedly compromised by a series of illiberal 'reforms', their effectiveness in instituting the kind of genuine individual responsibilities proposed by the *New Times* project has been limited. The protection and agency offered to the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of society has effectively been hamstrung by the disinclination of the authorities.

If anything, the Human Rights Act has proven to be another stick with which to beat black, Asian and immigrant communities. Like the convention it is based on, the Act justifies the government's 'interference' with basic rights if national security is believed to be in jeopardy, or if the interference can be justified by concerns over crime or illegal immigration. The authority to discriminate is activated if a group is defined by either nationality, ethnic or national origin to be 'a threat to immigration control.'<sup>79</sup>

When offset by legislation which racialises refugees and justifies indefinite detention and against human rights infringement at the discretion of the executive and against the return of assimilationism, both the Macpherson report and the Human Rights Act have at best been powerless against the entrenchment of state racism; at worst (the Act in particular) they have become instrumental in that circuitry.

It is my contention that synchronising public attitudes to citizenship with the findings of the Lawrence Inquiry and the Human Rights Act could be crucial in arresting the degradation of anti-racist culture, and presenting a coherent devolution of individual responsibility where the most vulnerable in society occupy a symbolically central role. The rationale for proposing an alternative citizenship is to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.91.

undo some of the damage inflicted by the politicisation of immigration and asylum over the past decade. As Kymlicka has proved by recourse to the Canadian model, it is possible to enlighten public attitudes by officially endorsing progressive positions on these issues (in their case it's been done by constitutionalising multiculturalism).

Here, where the challenges are exacerbated by racially and ethnically structured inequalities, a more radical approach is needed. Since citizenship symbolically and substantively recurs in race relations politics, it's the axis on which the terms of the public debate can shift.

By focussing on citizenship in the service of self-determined anti-racism, I am forcibly mating a constituent feature of the *New Times* project with the state critique of racism popularised by Sivanandan and *Race and Class*. Despite their numerous and ideological points of exclusion, the *New Times* collective produced some worthwhile insights, particularly in marking the decline of traditional collectives, insights which could be appropriated by progressive anti-racism. The discussion that Hall and Held began fifteen years ago is instructive now: the politics of citizenship today must come to terms with, and attempt to strike a balance between, the individual and the social dimensions of citizenship rights.<sup>80</sup>

New Labour's introduction of citizenship studies to the national curriculum has in turn politicised education and made of it a contested field. Many teachers and educational theorists have found it imperative to situate citizenship in schools 'within a context of cultural diversity', and 'on the basis of human rights'.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Hall and Held, p.179.

<sup>81</sup> Audrey Ousler and Hugh Starkey, 'Citizenship, Human Rights and Cultural Diversity', *Citizenship and Democracy*, p.4.

Enlarging the scope of citizenship literacy from the classroom to the whole of society must be the next immediate task.

As the reception of the Human Rights Act has already demonstrated, international human rights standards can act as the 'social glue' needed to maintain a welfare society. Human rights discourse encourages rather than inhibits values of mutual obligations. As both a framework of values and a code of ethics, human rights standards are invested with an authority and legitimacy which far exceed that of any existing at national level. While they articulate the values and duties required to cohere society they also – through their emphasis on the universal character of rights and responsibilities - prevent 'One Nation' from becoming exclusive, oppressive or nationalistic.<sup>82</sup>

Though this itself represents an advance on cultural nationalist definitions of citizenship, the basis of this cohesion is also more principled and therefore *aspirational*. Unlike cultural nationalist expressions, such as Goodhart's recommendations to mould citizenship discourse around Britain's inherited values, shared experiences and histories, a citizenship based on human rights would be anchored around common aspirations. It would be directed towards futures, not weighed down by postcolonial melancholia and a neurotic inability to mourn imperial ghosts.<sup>83</sup>

Human rights should be privileged above both national and political cultures as the context in which citizenship is discussed. While some, like Barry (2001), Ahmad (2001) and Rawls (1993) suggest that either socialism or liberalism is sufficiently

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<sup>82</sup> Richardson, p.81.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Gilroy, 'Joined Up Politics and Post-Colonial Melancholia' London Institute of Contemporary Arts Diversity Lecture (1999).



principled, aspirational and universal to frame national community, they both suffer from a plurality of interpretations which render them impossible projects to pursue. Their ideological schizophrenia – as witnessed in the differences between Barry and Goodhart and the disagreements between Hall and Sivanandan who each claim socialism or liberalism for their own perspective – would produce imagined communities, which, to quote Goodhart, ‘would be so wide as to become meaningless’.<sup>84</sup> And as Parekh points out in his critique of Rawls, elevating one political culture as sovereign will have the unwitting effect of stigmatising dissenting values in the public sphere.<sup>85</sup>

These aspirations should be consistently and public affirmed to strengthen contractual obligations on both sides, between the state and the individual. Human rights language would make accountability to these aspirations more transparent. The abolition of institutional racisms should be one of these aspirations, since it is so critical to the realisation of a truly just society.

A definition of citizenship grounded in human rights would also denude citizenship of its semantic associations with naturalisation. It would serve to publicly denounce the vocabulary and the logic of integration. Instead, it would be reconceived as a reference to empowerment. Expressing citizen status as a right inscribing collective responsibility, it would universalise the subjective ownership of rights. Citizenship would be defined as incorporation to shared forms of agency rather than integration to cultural values. The impact on criminalized and racialised communities would be to turn membership of national community on its ideological

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<sup>84</sup> Goodhart.

<sup>85</sup> Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* p.89.

head. Whereas the assimilationist thrust of orthodox constructions of citizenship talks exclusively about minority responsibilities (to the majority culture) human rights citizenship illuminates the range of *universal* rights.

These rights are of disproportionately more benefit for minorities when dovetailed with the provisions of the Human Rights Act. In conjunction with the Act, the enactment of collective responsibility is capable of producing meaningful political results, particularly in the sphere of racial justice. If the Act was allowed widespread influence and application it is possible to envisage a more optimistic perception of rights among vulnerable members of society (especially if the political literacy in its provisions was popularised). A human rights based citizenship would therefore both expand zones of personal responsibility and the scope to act on it – the *New Times* mandate for social individualism – but with identifiably socialist and anti-racist dimensions. This would be another characteristic difference between citizenship as empowerment and citizenship as integration: an emphasis on substantive and not ‘symbolic’ aspects.

Since (as we have shown) the state is bound up with machineries of discrimination it is unlikely that such a notion of citizenship will ever be officially championed, and so it falls to the Left and sympathetic organisations and communities to arm minorities with human rights consciousness so that they are able to own human rights as a *condition* of their citizenship (regardless of how it may be racialised by the state). As state racism is increasingly brokered through legal instruments (even those ostensibly intended to make it more responsive to

minorities) autonomous antiracist interventions will need to learn rights discourse as a matter of effective protection and a means of legitimate protest.

As Hall and Held (1990) insist, citizenship must have the 'double focus' of rights and practices. Without the latter, the devolution of responsibility will be an empty award for anti-racist politics in particular. It's worth remembering that Paul Gilroy's obituary of antiracism 1980s was built on the complaint that concentrating resources in the local authority left the black community's capacity for autonomous self-organisation 'actively confused and confounded'.<sup>86</sup> It left the perception that 'antiracism seems very comfortable with the idea of blacks as victims'.<sup>87</sup>

New Labour (and future governments) must therefore desist from its *modus operandi* under the multiculturalist regime – courting community leaders – and empower both civil society movements which can exert real democratic pressure for reform and the secular, dissenting voices who have been continually suppressed by their self-appointed cultural ambassadors. In 'Return of Assimilationism' (2004) Les Back *et al* expose the hollow centre of the government's commitment to ethnic minority engagement. This has not been dialogue to deliver outcomes, only dialogue to tick boxes:

Ethnic minority communities and political representatives have found themselves either disappointed or betrayed by a government that seemed to promise so much (...) Ethnic minority representatives appear to find themselves caught in a dilemma when government offers to

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<sup>86</sup> Paul Gilroy, 'The End of Anti-Racism', in *Race and Local Politics* (eds) John Solomos and Wendy Ball (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991) p.208.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

listen. To participate in consultative mechanisms can leave them feeling manipulated and muted at the end of the process but the alternative is even more frightening for most of them.<sup>88</sup>

It's no surprise that Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, has openly spoken of his distrust for 'declarations of goodwill' and his organisation's new focus on 'race equality outcomes.' This is multiculturalism's 'legacy'.<sup>89</sup>

The democratisation of socialism augured by the *New Times* collective has degenerated into the pseudo-Thatcherism of New Labour. The government has not used citizenship as a vehicle with which to express the multiple contestations of Britishness, but as a crucible in which national integration could be enforced.

Sivanandan's (1976 ) prophecy that 'a class of collaborators' would be thrown up by the state would appear to have borne out by a race relations industry which for too long has been slavishly obedient to the banal edicts of the multiculturalist regime. Only now, five years after the Macpherson report, can a noteworthy proportion of the Left be considered to have awoken to the frailties of multiculturalism.

From both the Right and the Left, from the dominion of Thatcherism to the false dawn of 'new times', both the state centred critique of racism and self determined antiracism have been progressively debilitated. If anything, the public discourse

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<sup>88</sup> Back *et al*, 3.14-15.

<sup>89</sup> Trevor Phillips, p.7.

around immigration has regressed and become more assimilationist over the past decade.

This is despite the optimism prematurely encouraged by the findings of the Lawrence Inquiry and the egalitarian provisions of the Human Rights Act. These landmark developments have been washed up like beached whales and the tide has fiercely turned against ethnic minorities.

It's happened because New Labour is a political formation riddled with contradictions. With one hand it offers individual responsibility while with the other it retracts the means with which to act on it. The executive decisions to pull the weight of the Human Rights Act against individual liberties and derogations from the Geneva Convention are cases in point. Without an empowered and secular civil society, Britain will painfully and inexorably slide into a xenophobic majoritarianism anchored by rampant institutional racism.

In the next chapter I'll examine how state economic policy can be a mechanism of discrimination by looking at how the New Economic Policy (NEP) is effectively a form of economic majoritarianism that has concentrated power in the 'new' middle classes while disenfranchising India's minorities, thereby reinforcing the hegemony of the cultural majority and the elite identity of Hindu nationalism.



## Cultures of Capitalism: Hindutva and the New Economic Policy

- No nation can prosper if its more well-to-do citizens actually think that the best way to counter the unspeakable squalor and poverty and disease and illiteracy of the vast majority is to take as little notice of them as possible.' Pavan Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (1998)
- 'India's underachievement in the social and economic spheres has been especially glaring in the view of the rapid growth achieved by many developing countries in the world. Our poor developmental indicators have predictably had an adverse impact on India's global image and influence.' BJP, 'The Chennai Declaration' (2000)

If the scope for civic citizenship to viably challenge the majoritarian state is compromised by the communalisation of civil society, then there are persuasive reasons to believe that political citizenship itself is too weakly implanted for a human rights culture to be enacted in India.

In the absence of effective political and juridical recognition of the individual citizen, such as the state's failures to uphold either constitutional rights or directives

‘related to poverty, functional equity, education and social and economic justice’,<sup>1</sup> it is little wonder that a preference for collective representation, occasionally coextensive with the ‘reification of religious and caste identities’ arises in the absence of actually existing citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

Hindutva is not only a high caste riposte to widening democratisation and its threat to the integralist ambitions for a unified Hindu nation but also a fascist vision, capitalising on the failures of secular enfranchisement, to transform the very terms of India’s political culture.

As Nehruvian designs for modernisation has atrophied and withered in the political wilderness, the inequalities of substantive rather than formal citizenship have been exacerbated by the creeping dominance of economic neo-liberalism in the shape of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Gurcharan Das’ *India Unbound* (2002) is merely the shrillest in the chorus of ‘Manmohanaics’ (India’s champions of economic neo-liberalism); the prevailing common sense is that capital deregulation and the withdrawal of the state represents the shortest path to accelerated development.

There is a tight fit between neo-liberalism and majoritarianism in the process of national reinvention which has taken place since the early 1990s. Jaffrelot (1996), Blom Hansen (1999) and Rajagopal (1999) have all commented on the coincidence of Hindutva’s ascendancy with the restructuring of the Indian economy in the image of the NEP by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh under the watchful instruction of the IMF and World Bank.

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<sup>1</sup> Chetan Bhatt, ‘Democracy and Hindu Nationalism,’ *Democratization* 11.4 (2004).p.145.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The NEP has been systematically exposing Indian markets to the global economy while privatising and deregulating industry. The net effect of this aggressive capitalism has been the renunciation of welfare as a state concern and the consolidation of elite and middle class power. The strident advance of neo-liberalism found expression as early as the economic budget of 1992. Upendra Baxi noted at the time that the very language of welfare was conspicuous by its absence, while the comprehensive excision of references 'to 'the poor' documented the Indian state's plunging insensitivity to poverty.<sup>3</sup>

The same neo-liberal currents that have condemned India's poor have propelled the 'rise and rise of a middle class'.<sup>4</sup> The NEP has overseen the most explosive period of middle class growth in modern India's history. Since its inauguration in 1991, the middle classes have doubled in size. It now stands, according to Das, at 15%, though this figure is set to rise exponentially over the next forty-five years, and he expects it to reach 50% 'within a generation'.<sup>5</sup> If Orientalism was, as Bryan Turner (1983) suggests, predicated on the visible absence of bourgeois institutions in the colonial periphery, such as a visible middle class with notable private property, then this cartography has been steadily discredited with the growth of 'Middle India'.<sup>6</sup> A snapshot of metropolitan India would testify to the vibrancy of the urban rich, with an escalation of technological investment in the form of new highways

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<sup>3</sup> G. Pandey 'The Civilised and the Barbarian: The 'New' Politics of Late Twentieth Century India and The World' ' in Gyanendra Pandey (ed ) *Hindus and others : the question of identity in India today* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993,p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Gurcharan Das, *India Unbound : from Independence to the Global Information Age* London : Profile, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan Turner, *Religion and social theory: a materialist perspective* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1983) p.36.

and a tripling of cellular phone lines in the past two years.<sup>7</sup> It is ironic that the proliferation of these networks, signifiers of mass communication and national interconnectedness, should highlight the invisible borders being drawn between India's haves and have-nots. Cars and cell phones are the accessories of a middle class lifestyle; yet they are subsidised by the poor. Cellular networks in particular are multiplying at the expense of landlines so that now only 5 out of 100 Indians have access to a basic phone line.<sup>8</sup> Pavan Varma's *The Great Middle Class* (1998) laments the middle class' abdication of social responsibility as a disturbing adjunct to the extreme disequilibria of the 'digital divide'.

The relentless 'Westernisation' of urban India, the blight of industrialization on the social landscape and the discontent brought by material inequalities would all outwardly appear to lock Hindutva's austere, puritan cultural nationalism with its integralist ambitions and the NEP into intractable conflict. Neo-liberal development carries with it the threat of intrusive globalization and the revolutionizing of domestic time and space, all rhetorically construed as debilitations and assaults on India's moral character and cultural sovereignty by the Hindu Right.

This chapter probes the congruence between the NEP and policies of economic neo-liberalism with the cultural nationalism of the Sangh Parivar. It argues, following Desai (2002) that Hindutva is nationalism whose identity is ordered around that the culture of its social and economic elite. Although neo-liberal policies would appear to be anathema to the austerity of RSS ideology, this interpretation overstates Hindutva's superficial resemblance to religious fundamentalisms and

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<sup>7</sup> Praful Bidwai, 'World Social Forum: Dark Spots Come out in 'Shining India'', available <<http://www.ipsnews.net/interna.asp?idnews=21865>> Accessed 16 April 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

understates its investment in state discrimination. Instead, the congruity between Hindutva and the NEP illustrates to what extent they are compulsions of the same majoritarian system in which the disenfranchisement or fractional enfranchisement of national Others reinforces the hegemony of the cultural majority.

The chapter also argues that postcolonial critiques of Eurocentrism militate against an apprehension of the reciprocity between neo-fascism with neo-liberalism, or culture and capital. Using Arif Dirlik's (1997) insights into the transformation of visions of national liberation into alternative syndications of capitalism (what he terms 'cultures of capitalism') this essay describes the reciprocal manipulation of cultural boundaries in the service of economic power and the impact this has on the weak enfranchisement of marginalized citizens.

I want to demonstrate why certain nominally 'postcolonial' critiques of Eurocentrism debilitate a holistic apprehension of the character of Hindu nationalism, not as an ideology of religious fundamentalism, but as a hegemonic majoritarianism with fascistic leanings. Despite the idealism of alternative development mooted in RSS philosophies such as Deendayal Upadhyaya's *Integral Humanism* (1977), severing India from structural dependencies of socialism and capitalism (and thereby redeeming humanity from the spiritual torpor of Western modernity), Hindutva's political interests lie in generating discriminatory not egalitarian outcomes.<sup>9</sup> I hope to show the implications of this critical blindness and

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<sup>9</sup> 'Both these systems, capitalist as well as communist, have failed to take account of Integral Man, his future and complete personality and his aspirations. One considers him a mere selfish being hankering after money, having only one law, the law of fierce competition, in essence the law of the jungle; whereas the other has viewed him as a feeble lifeless cog in the whole scheme of things, regulated by rigid rules, and incapable of any good unless directed. The centralisation of power, economic and political, implied in both. Both, therefore, result in dehumanisation of man.' Pt.



how a comprehensive disavowal of a Marxist critique obscures the dialogic and dialectic exchange between Hindu nationalism and global capital.

Arif Dirlik (2002) finds in postcolonial histories of colonialism an erasure of the systemic and the economic and their substitution by the textual and the personal.<sup>10</sup> In so far as economic exploitation declined in intellectual imaginations of colonialism there has been a corresponding inclination for the politics of national liberation to be conceived through cultural frames of reference. In other words, as the weight of intellectual favour has shifted against materialist analysis, opportunities for the ideological expansion of cultural nationalism have proliferated.

Anti-colonial nationalism's fundamental premise was that colonial formations were capitalist installations that drained economic wealth from the peripheries to the metropolises. It was based on the model of a structural dialectic between coloniser and colonised. The classic Indian nationalist thesis that Britain de-industrialised India is characteristic of this. In his *Discovery of India* (1960), Nehru eloquently narrates this servility as that of being 'bound hand and foot to a faraway island which imposed its will upon her'. He laments further that 'it was still more monstrous that this forcible union had resulted in poverty and degradation beyond measure'.<sup>11</sup> Colonialism, conceived as an operation of structural *economic* exploitation, erected novel social formations where one class parasitically bled wealth from another, regressively redistributing capital from the bottom of society to the top, from the

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Deendayal Upadhyaya, Shri Guruji, Shri D.B. Thengdi, *The Integral Approach* (New Delhi: Deendayal Research Institute, 1979) p.73.

<sup>10</sup> Arif Dirlik, 'Rethinking Colonialism: Globalisation, Postcolonialism and the Nation', *Interventions* 4.3 (2002).p.24.

<sup>11</sup> [Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1965) pp 60-61.

colonised to the colonising society. It is no coincidence that is precisely the terms in which neo-liberalism is described.<sup>12</sup>

Postcolonial India's economic nationalism reflected this conviction. It was structured around two complementary pressures – the internal project of decolonisation, and the post-war economic and political orthodoxy. The latter, as Ankie Hoogstrem (1997) explains, arose from the conceptual ascendancy of the nation-state in the immediate aftermath of the second world war:

[there] was an increasingly strident economic nationalism in the Third World countries themselves (...) Self-determination and the sovereignty of the national state, however large or small, was the overriding principle of international relations (...) Second, state-centrism also engulfed notions of the economy (...) The dominance of Keynesianism as macro-economic theory, with its acceptance of state intervention in the economies of the advanced countries, ideologically spilt over into and converged with the developmentalist state notions of the liberal modernisation theories. Less developed countries were spurred on to take their economic destinies into their own hands.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 'Another structural feature of neo-liberalism consists in remunerating capital to the detriment of labour and thus moving wealth from the bottom of society to the top. If you are, roughly, in the top 20 percent of the income scale, you are likely to gain something from neo-liberalism and the higher you are up the ladder, the more you gain. Conversely, the bottom 80 percent all lose and the lower they are to begin with, the more they lose proportionally.' Susan George, *A Short History of Neoliberalism*, Available at <<http://www.tni.org/george/index.htm>>, March 24-26, 1999, 2004.> accessed January 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalisation and the Postcolonial World : The New Political Economy of Development* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).p.24.

The former were informed both by the desire for a strong, authoritative state presence in a nation recently convulsed by near-civil war, but also from the legacy of the Quit India movement. Given the mercantile interests at the heart of the Indian imperial project, the economy became a central site of struggle between Indian nationalists and the British colonial regime. The invention of a national economy is therefore an important ideological resource that sustains a larger nationalist idea.

Though Nehruvianism would be characterised as a paradigmatic bourgeois nationalism, it was intellectually inspired by the structural socio-economic perspective on imperialism that has retrospectively become known as dependency theory. Nehru the *dependentista* clearly believed, in the spirit of Frank (1967), that Britain's development and India's underdevelopment were 'opposite faces of the same coin'.<sup>14</sup>

Dependency theory has since been intellectually eclipsed by postcolonial theory since the early 1970s. Though both are critiques of liberal modernity, the respective focus of each are (outwardly) contradictory; while dependency theorists cannot look beyond the inequalities wrought beyond global capitalist development, postcolonial theory addresses itself to discursive regimes of Orientalism.

Postcolonial theory chronologically regards itself as the answer to the poverties of dependency theory. It considers the *dependentistas* casual treatment of culture as a critical limitation for a nuanced critique of modernity. Postcolonialists consequently argue that dependency theory fails to be self-reflexive to the cultural situatedness of

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<sup>14</sup> A.G. Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review, 1967) p.38.

its Marxist analysis. More subtle critiques hold that the insistence of binary expressions of imperial traffic (metropole-periphery, development-underdevelopment) consolidates the ideological and psychological habituation of modernity.<sup>15</sup>

Thirdly, postcolonial theory contests the reservation of political subjectivity to the nation-state in dependency theories of imperialism since its nationalist (and statist) proclivities erase subaltern agency and what Bhabha has termed the 'micro-technics' of power which are as molecular as they are pervasive.

The postcolonial re-imagining of the colonial encounter (which even in its most materialist guise rejects the foundational status of capitalism) has therefore generally overtaken a *dependenista* critique of modernity. Colonialism, in its dematerialized form, has in Dirlik's terms, superceded capitalism as the 'central datum of modern history'.<sup>16</sup> This dislocation of capitalism from the scene of oppression, its excision from colonial theatre, has occurred with the local foregrounded at the expense of the global and where scene has won privilege over structure. A lasting consequence of postcolonialism's discursive ascendancy has been the decentring of capitalism from inquiries into imperialism:

These are the voices that have come forward over the last two decades when there has been a distinct shift in postcolonial discourse from the economic and political to the cultural and the personal experiential.

Introduced into the colonial context, this has resulted in a disassociation

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<sup>15</sup> Ilan Kapoor, 'Capitalism, Culture, Agency: Dependency Versus Postcolonial Theory,' *Third World Quarterly* 23.4 (2002).p.654.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.432.

of questions of culture and cultural identity from the structures of capitalism, shifting the grounds for discourse to the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, unmediated by the structures of political economy within which questions of culture had been subsumed earlier.<sup>17</sup>

Postcolonial theory's culturalist obsession with debunking the hubris of Enlightenment teleology, such as in Dipesh Chakrabarty's project of 'provincialising Europe,' and Ashis Nandy's critical traditionalism, has, as Neil Lazarus (1997) demonstrated at length, precipitated a disavowal of historical materialism as a politically viable resource for non-West analysis.<sup>18</sup> This has been taken place more broadly against the renunciation of all 'Western' discourse as various expressions of its 'cultural personality', complicit with the imperialist project of capitalism. 'Liberated' from the tyrannies of rational analysis, it can only govern resistance through cultural discourse itself. Culturalism's main challenge to the hegemonic world order has been to present native cultures and epistemologies as emancipating resources to unravel the violence of Eurocentric modernity by retrieving them from the residual shadow of Western knowledge.

Excusing capital from colonialism has had profound consequences. Firstly it has given rise to a tendency to overlook materialist acts of resistance in favour of oppositional cultural practices that are deemed to be more 'subversive and

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<sup>17</sup> Dirlik, p.432.

<sup>18</sup> Neil Lazarus, 'The Fetish of the "West" in postcolonial theory', in Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (eds) *Marxism, Modernity & Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002) p.63.



transgressive'.<sup>19</sup> By valorizing agency in the symbolic sphere above that in the economic sphere (subversive religious transformations above taxpayer revolt, for example) culturalist intellectualism has nurtured an ambiguous silence on global questions for socio-economic justice. For these reasons alone, the relationship governing the postcolonial and the socialist remains defiantly vexed if not fatally incommensurable (despite erudite interventions from Gayatri Spivak among others). The epistemic shift inaugurated by postcolonialism has relegated socialism from the aspiration of opposition nationalist liberation movements to a canon of imperial ideologies assailing the cultural integrity of decolonised space.

So even while postcolonial theory can legitimately distance itself from fascistic nationalisms through its repudiation of meta-narratives and macropolitics, its 'elective disaffiliation' from counter-hegemonic projects (such as state socialism and secularism) allow it to float ambiguously as a pliable intellectual resource to be marshaled for regressive politics without discernible contradictions. It has therefore, as Bhatt (1997), Desai (2002) and Nanda (2003) have all argued, not only disabled a rationalist and materialist critique of cultural nationalism but given credibility to emergent form of political resistance conceived under the ubiquitous sign of culture. Ashis Nandy has written in this vein that since colonialism is primarily a 'state of mind', it needs to be defeated ultimately 'in the minds of men'.<sup>20</sup> National liberation has thus been recast as the salvation of an imperiled 'national culture', something politically conducive to Hindu nationalist propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994)p.20.

<sup>20</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983)p.3.

This is duly reflected in a succession of Sangh Parivar pronouncements that attribute India's economic degradation to the socialist policies of Congress nationalism. They mobilize the nebulous semantics of *swadeshi* to denounce socialism as divisive and hence anti-national. This strident hostility to socialist goals marks a watershed in the critiques of colonialism, intellectually countenanced by the prominence of the poststructuralist critique of modernity.

In political opposition the BJP adopted a quasi-*dependenista* analysis that correlated India's material underdevelopment with the surrender of its national sovereignty and concluded that paths towards socialism recuperate colonial dependencies.

The Sangh argued that by reducing itself to a debtor country, a servile satellite of the West, India had stagnated behind the colonial frontier. Although the economy had overall growth under the successive Nehru administrations, the state had been borrowing heavily from the IMF and World Bank (who forced Congress' hand into the economic reforms and NEP). This propagated the image of India as a lowly parasite among the community of nations, its economic dependence on multinational organisations leaving it languishing, in the eyes of the BJP, at 'the bottom of the international pile, an abject basket case that has to beg regularly for alms from international agencies which treat it with disdain'.<sup>22</sup> The BJP jeered India's leaders for mortgaging the nation's sovereign spirit (*swadeshi*) to donor agencies as the country has fallen further and further into dependency. The foreign ownership of Indian resources has, in turn, wounded national pride and degraded the national

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<sup>22</sup> BJP, *Humanistic Approach to Economic Development- A Swadeshi Approach* (BJP: Delhi, 1992), p.8.

spirit. This theme of deprivation at external hands, invoked time and again to decry the evils of colonialism, has been recycled to describe India's failure to control its own modernity. The following excerpts from RSS and BJP propaganda index national indebtedness and underdevelopment to the erosion of sovereignty:

While Independent Bharat started with a balance of Rs. 18,000 crores, the Bharat of 1992 is in debt to the tune of 400,000 crores. The so-called 'Industrial Revolution', supposed to have led to the prosperity of the West, was made possible from the post-Plassey loot from Bharat. With no such plundered capital, Bharat obviously could not reach the heights of material progress scaled in the West. This externally induced impoverishment has been used by the West to make Bharat a debtor country (...) There is a need to recreate the self-confidence of the people of Bharat. Not so long ago, Bharat produced such superior yarn that Britain had to ban the sale of textiles from Bharat. Likewise, Bharat produced the best steel in the world (...) that the indigenous science and technology of Bharat were deliberately crushed by the West is undisputed. Curiously, the same colonialist intervention from the West continues even on the eve of the twenty-first century, now in the form of GATT, World Bank and IMF conditionalities'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Swadeshi Andolan, *Struggle for Economic Freedom* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sangama, 1994).

This narrative India finds itself 'lagging behind' and 'reduced to 'beggars'. India's 'externally induced impoverishment' had recapitulated its colonial bondage, and India now goes with 'begging bowls before the affluent nations and multinationals'.<sup>24</sup> This resonates with a popular perception among the provincial and urban lower middle classes who felt that 'betting on socialism', has been a major historical miscalculation that has left India stranded among the ruins of a fatigued and defeated ideological empire.

The BJP has been adept at nurturing contempt for socialism and turning that contempt to its advantage. While in opposition it assaulted the Congress as an anti-nationalist party, claiming it had staked and was bartering with India's very sovereignty by reducing it to a debtor country in the mismanaged gamble that it had advertised as socialist development. It rhetorically pointed to the pollution of national identity by foreign economic governance, seeking to leverage popular disillusion into a coherent nationalist revolt. A typical BJP pronouncement where they are identified with the nation, is that 'the BJP is proud of the patriotic dedication and daring of the people who are not enamoured of the structural adjustments in alien clutches and cosmetic changes on borrowed plumage.'<sup>25</sup>

The Hindu nationalist denunciation of socialism took place in a culturalist idiom. Socialism was regarded not as an aspiration or alternative to a hegemonic world system, but the cultural beachhead of neo-colonialism. It was portrayed as having been imported by a Congress comprador class bent on subduing indigenous

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<sup>24</sup> Rajendra Singh, *Telegraph* May 4, 1995.

<sup>25</sup> BJP statement, quoted in Thomas Blom Hansen, 'The Ethics of Hindutva and the Spirit of Capitalism', Hansen & Jaffrelot (eds), *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press: 1998), p.303.



technologies and knowledge under the thumb of Enlightenment rationality. Nowhere in Sangh appraisals of socialism is there a recognition of Nehru's understanding of it as the 'uplift of the poor' and according to his own unique definition, of 'giving every Indian the fullest opportunity to develop himself according to [his or her] capacity'.<sup>26</sup>

Instead it was ideologically bundled with other tenets of the Nehruvian consensus responsible for shackling India to the ethnocentric master narratives of the West. Instead of interrogating how global capitalism had fractured the nation along the vast faultlines of property and dispossession, the Sangh has articulated national disunity around the cultural identities of Indian against alien, indigenous versus Western intelligences.<sup>27</sup>

This was encapsulated by Hindu nationalism's repudiation of third world solidarity by repeatedly insisting that any kind of outside influence was invidious to India's national spirit. It condemned socialism as the voluntary perpetuation of foreign rule in India. Because it is not a 'Bharatiya idea' it is depicted as cancerously aggravating a series of debilitating reactions that has gradually induced the infirmity of the national soul. Not only did it stifle growth and roadblock entrepreneurship, but its manner of sectioning pockets of society against each other is culpable for national

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<sup>26</sup> The identification of poverty as the greatest enemy of the nation and the concern of socialism extended as the slogan of Congress from the nationalist movement's determination for the 'uplift of the poor' to Indira Gandhi's electoral promise for '*garibi hatao*' (end poverty).

<sup>27</sup> Politically, this was paralleled by the crisis of legitimacy suffered by the Left in the post 1968 era. Socialism, which had historically catalyzed the aspirations of the colonized world, by conceiving a opt out of the structural dependence on advanced capitalist societies, was teetering on the brink of a crisis that was cataclysmically played out by the collapse of the Soviet power bloc in the late 1980s. Where once capitalism had been apprehended as the imperialising architecture of colonialism, and socialism seized as a revolutionary challenge to the hegemony of metropolitan power (realized in the aspirations of the Bandung conference) the latter has been ideologically severed from the developmental agendas of 'Third world' nationalisms.



disunity and dishonour. David Frawley's rallying critique, *Awaken Bharata* (1988), elaborates on these themes to denounce socialism because of its over reliance on the state. Frawley articulates a reasoned neo-liberal rejoinder which echoes Gurcharan Das' argument that socialist policies discouraged entrepreneurship and that market liberalisation stimulates economic growth. He writes that it had reduced citizens to 'beggars', and 'wards of the state' clamouring for its patronage:

It [socialism] does not encourage independence and effort in the masses but turns them into children and wards of the state. Leftist political leaders in India, as elsewhere, found that they could easily control such uneducated masses, fashioning them into vote banks under the promise of government rewards, which encourages the government to keep the people backward(...) The result is that socialism stifles economic development and a large section of the country becomes dependant upon government favours, which further creates corruption and bribery. This has happened to some extent in all socialist states but India is among the worst. The nation instead of raising all of its people together, has its different classes trying to feed off one another and fighting with each other for government patronage.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> David Frawley, *Awaken Bharata* (New Delhi: Voice of India: 1988) p.14.

From Frawley's critique it is easy to deduce why majoritarian politics are so hostile to socialism. Firstly, poor minorities are often perceived as being carried by the socialist state; in the particular instance of India under Nehruvian socialism, these minorities were often religious (such as Muslims). Hindu nationalism is thus instinctively equated with secularism by the Hindutva ideologue because both are deemed to put the (cultural) majority at a disadvantage. Under alien regimes, the estrangement of the cultural majority from the state is correspondingly projected as an inevitable outcome of its undemocratic bias.

This virulent anti-socialism takes its precedence from Hindutva's Spenglerian insistence on India's cultural exceptionalism. It follows that Hindu culture has an innate temper which must govern all its cultural products from mathematics to poetry and inform its political philosophy in particular.<sup>29</sup> This 'strategically essentialist' apprehension of the national culture therefore rejects socialism as a supreme form of imperialism - as violence against this cultural essence. Correspondingly, national liberation is conceptualised in irreducibly culturalist terms. As Nanda (2004) observes, a brigade of subalternist critics of modernity, led by Chatterjee, Chakrabarty and Nandy, has risen in defence of this view of Indian culture as ineffable and exceptional through their own efforts to answer back to the epistemic violence of Eurocentrism.<sup>30</sup>

This disavowal of socialism as culturally inimical and intellectually alien to India, coterminous with a persistent anti-statism, has had profound implications for the

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<sup>29</sup> Meera Nanda, 'Postmodernism, Hindu nationalism and 'Vedic science'', *Frontline* 21:1 Jan 03-16, 2004. Available <<http://www.frontline.com>>. Accessed February 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

passage of neo-liberal ascendancy. Through the deeply held reciprocity between political and intellectual formations, capitalism's return to ideological centre stage - in its latest and most baleful avatar – passed without observation in significant quarters of the postcolonial academy.

This secondary consequence of amputating capitalism from the exchange between metropole and periphery has been to allow capitalism itself to re-emerge innocent of its operational role in the production of racialised disadvantage. The failure of socialism to successfully enfranchise the poor Indian populace is expressly counterpoised with the possibilities for national rejuvenation made available by economic liberalization. Neo-liberalism is therefore deemed to be instrumental to the destiny of the Hindu *rashtra*.

As the Third World imperative to create alternative social formations has subsided into a preoccupation with producing customized cultures of capitalism, capital itself has been rearticulated as expressive of a cultural essence. Ultimately, this has meant merely suturing a rampant neo-liberalism with the nationalist conceit of a sovereign national culture. It has been seamlessly reworked into the nationalist 'cultures of capitalism' which, having been popularized in East Asia, have now become the official rhetorical stance of the Hindu nationalist BJP in India. Gurcharan Das' (2002) conclusion that despite being the original 'owners of the reform packages', the BJP behave as though wealth and poverty is a secondary issue' is a disingenuous alibi for the fraternal instrumentality between neo-liberalism and cultural nationalism.

A significant rhetorical move in the domestication of the latest capitalist offensives has been to depict the global economy as instrumental to the (Hindu) nation. It has sought to portray the global economy as an arena in which India can parade its national achievements. To this end, the information or knowledge industries have been to the BJP what the economic historian Andrew Wyatt (2003) calls a 'political boon'.<sup>31</sup> The now deposed Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has used India's growth in these sectors to inflate India's global status, going as far as to declare India a 'software superpower'.<sup>32</sup>

His speech on Independence Day 2003, exemplified the centrality of the NEP to the identity of the Hindu *rashtra*. Once the opening speech establishes the unity of India around a set of conventionally popular figures (the martyrs of the independence struggle, the soldiers patrolling the Kashmir border, and the national flag itself) Vajpayee orients the remainder of his speech towards the economy. He goes on to congratulate a spectrum of economic agents, from farmers, workers to businessmen and professionals. The software industry is singled out for special praise as a source of 'dynamism' that provides employment and boosts exports. The continued high growth of these areas assures the government's pledge that India will be a 'Developed Nation' by 2020.<sup>33</sup> The predilection for the 2020 benchmark, reiterated by Jaswant Singh among other ministers, is indicative of the critical

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31 Andrew Wyatt, 'Re-narrating Indian Development: Economic Nationalism in the 1950s and the 1990s' available at:

<[www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/download/events/Narratives\\_Economic\\_Nationalism.doc](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/download/events/Narratives_Economic_Nationalism.doc)>. Accessed February 2004. Vanaik (2001) also believes that at the same time, 'there was a synchronisation of thought at the elite level across the global space, 'in the eighties, the upper echelons of functionaries in the Ministries of Finance, Commerce and Industry were increasingly drawn into the mental orbit of their counterparts in the West'. Achin Vanaik, 'The New Indian Right', available at: <[http://www.sacw.net/2002/achin\\_NewIndianRight.html](http://www.sacw.net/2002/achin_NewIndianRight.html)>. Accessed February 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Atal Bihari Vajpayee, quoted in *The Hindu*, 19/12/99.

<sup>33</sup> Vajpayee, Independence Day speech 2003, cited in Wyatt.

importance of economic India's global prestige to the Hindutva project. Capitalism is instrumental to Hindu nationalism because 'development' is indispensable to the rising expectations of the middle classes and guarantees the electoral support of its electoral heartland. It also expressly counterpoises itself to Nehruvian socialism, which is characterised as perpetuating colonial captivity and the flow of wealth from India to the West.

Other senior ministers, including former Deputy Prime Minister (Home Minister at the time) L.K. Advani have argued that liberalisation is an inevitable and irreversible process which India is fully committed to:

Neither its reality nor its irreversibility can be questioned. If anything, it is a development that bids fair to advance rapidly and in ways that cannot even be fully envisioned today. This being the truth, any position that opposes, and seeks to roll back globalisation *per se* is as futile as it is untenable.<sup>34</sup>

In the recent 'Vision 2020' document, published to coincide with the ultimately unsuccessful re-election campaign, this substantive shift in economic policy was given equally concrete expression. Globalisation is openly embraced and geared to consolidating India's position in global corporate capitalist frameworks. The utopian idealism of Deendayal's *Integral Humanism* – together with its aspiration of Third Worldist autonomy - has been obliterated from the BJP's social horizons.

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<sup>34</sup> L. K Advani,. (1998), 'Globalisation on the Solid Foundation of Swadeshi', Lecture to the 71st annual session of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, 25 October. . Available at <<http://www.rediff.com/business/1998/nov/02spl.htm>> Accessed March 2004.



Though it retains the vocabulary of *swadeshi*, it does so for emotive affect and cachet rather than any commitment to its original connotations of indigenous self-reliance. The BJP have redefined it to the generalised sense of 'a philosophy of India First'. More expressly, the document states that their concept of *swadeshi* (as distinct from earlier usages) can be apprehended as

"a strong, efficient and high-growth Indian economy, in which Indian products, services and entrepreneurs dominate the domestic and global markets. This can be achieved by making Indian products and services competitive on both cost and quality."

According to Praful Bidwai, this only codifies what the BJP have actively pursued since its accession to power at the Centre.<sup>35</sup> The neo-liberal bent of economic policy is 'irreversible', and its opposition 'futile' because such a reversal would compromise the compact between national bourgeois interests and foreign capital. Due to their very nature, the bourgeois classes are incapable of being either autonomously national or globalised, but maintain their elite status through a perpetually negotiated dependence on both national and foreign capital.<sup>36</sup> Today, all sections of Indian industry seek to collaborate with outside capital. The more flexible, manageable associations with capital enabled by the growing sophistications of globalisation have been widely embraced by India's industrial

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<sup>35</sup> Praful Bidwai, 'Vision and Vitriol', *Frontline*, April 10-23 2004. Available: <<http://www.flonet.com/fl2108.com/fl2108/stories/20040423007612700.htm>>. Accessed April 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Radhika Desai, *Slouching Towards Ayodhya* (New Delhi: ThreeEssaysPress: 2002) p.62.

elite.<sup>37</sup> If anything, globalisation and the race for advanced industrial technology is likely to exacerbate the developing world's structural dependence on foreign capital.<sup>38</sup> Gowan (2002) and George (1999) have elaborately explained the process of globalisation as a contrivance to leave the control of metropolitan capital over its periphery *in situ*, whether at international or national level by means of the imperial agency of the internal bourgeoisie.

The second rhetorical strategy of this domestication of late capitalism is its customisation to Hindu culture. This move is more expressly ideological and resonant with the theme of Hinduism's messianic role in national and world society. Its place in repeated instances of the BJP's political language – including the Vision 2020 document – betray an accommodation of RSS extremities in the BJP's manifesto.

The two discursive strategies – instrumentality and indigenisation – are mediated by the concept of *swadeshi*, central to both narratives. As the rhetorical locus of both it metonymically stands in for Hindutva itself in the ideological triangulation between the politics of culturalism, neo-liberalism and cultural nationalism.

*Swadeshi*'s appropriation into the logic of the Hindu culture of capitalism is advanced further in Advani's address to the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in 1998, 'Globalisation on the Solid Foundations of *Swadeshi*'. Advani cites *swadeshi* as a compass with which to navigate globalisation, reiterating the imperative for India to serve 'as a light unto itself', and preserve its cultural sovereignty. What Advani excludes from *swadeshi*'s semantic

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<sup>37</sup> Vanaik.

<sup>38</sup> Desai, p.100.

compass is as revealing as what he includes; it does not denote antagonism to foreign capital's assault on India's sovereignty because capital itself is benign, posing little threat to security or sovereignty.<sup>39</sup> The nebulous threat of global capitalism is casually mentioned as something to be wary of, but is negligible in the context of the entire speech. Advani is unequivocal, however, on the issue of protectionism and chastises those who might seek to appropriate *swadeshi* as the basis of Indian 'isolationism'.<sup>40</sup> It is worth quoting from an extended section of the speech where Advani substitutes *swadeshi* for Indian sovereignty, as the expression of a cultural ethos, and a messianic light not only for India but also for the world:

By *swadeshi* I mean the belief that there can be no uniform solution to the problems of economic and social development in a world which is both inherently diverse and also unequally structured today because of historical factors. Nature abhors uniformity. That is why in the social sphere too we see an immense degree of diversity, all of which tied together by an underlying unity. Many of the economic and other problems in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been created by the attempts to impose a uniform solution – be it the capitalist model or the socialist/communist model – on the whole world.(...) This is all the more true in the case of a continental country like India which is sustained by the world's oldest living civilisation. India cannot simply

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<sup>39</sup> This is in contrast to the hostility of militant factions within the Sangh Parivar, such as the RSS sponsored Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) which sought to moderate the flow of foreign investments into the highly industrialised and BJP controlled states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

<sup>40</sup> Wyatt.

cannot ape models and solutions worked out elsewhere. We must design our own path of economic development, confident in our ability to do so and proud of our many national achievements not only after we have become independent but also in our millennia-long history. Our achievements in culture, especially, are of great relevance to the world community facing an uncertain and worrying future. That is what I mean by *Swadeshi*. It has a positive content and thrust.<sup>41</sup>

In the new economic imaginary, *swadeshi* is extolled as the spirit of national pride and power rather than an insular retreat from globalisation. It is abstracted from specific economic practice to refer to a commitment to Indian social values, which must be protected from the erosive effects of global integration.

*Swadeshi* here is not counterpoised to globalisation (as it is in the more archaic ideologies of early Hindutva practitioners) but re-imagined as a critical ‘pre-requisite’ to meeting the ‘challenges of globalisation’; of preserving ‘our identity without compromising our sovereignty and self respect’.<sup>42</sup> In the policy document *A Humanistic Approach to Economic Development* (1992) for example, the BJP propose a ‘*swadeshi* of a self-confident hardworking modern nation that can deal with the world on terms of equality,’ with *swadeshi* defined as the “self-confidence to be able to face challenges of a rapidly changing world which is arming itself all

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> BJP statement, quoted in Hansen, p.308.

the time with new technologies ... a confidence and capability in consonance with our cultural mores and ethos'.<sup>43</sup>

This resonates very clearly with what Arif Dirlik (1997) writes of contemporary cultures of capitalism in the developing or Third World. The evolution of this breed of cultural nationalisms follow the contours of a series of historical ruptures, including the anti-colonial movements, the geo-political configuration of the Cold and post-Cold War eras, and the influences of the Bretton Woods institutions. The new elites in these nations have found their efforts to integrate at economic, political and social levels hamstrung by the interventions of 'globalisation and internationalisation' on the national economy. Having compromised control and sovereignty at these fundamental levels, they have sought integration at a cultural level by expressing national cultural essences which are capable of moderating the 'disruptive forces of global capitalism':

Neither should it be very surprising that, in many cases, these national essences are constructed to legitimise incorporation into Global Capitalism; in other words, to demonstrate that the national culture in essence is one that is consistent with, if not demanding of, participation in a capitalist economy.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, *Humanistic Approach to Economic Development: A Swadeshi Alternative*, quoted in Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Globalisation and Nationalist Imaginations: Hindutva's Promise of Equality through Difference', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 9, 1996, p.611.

<sup>44</sup> Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Capitalism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997) pp.156-8.



The 'incorporation' of 'national essences' into global capitalism rests upon a fundamentally culturalist apprehension of capitalism. In order for the national culture in essence to be 'consistent' with 'participation in a capitalist economy' capitalism itself needs to be conceptually described as singularly *cultural* rather than material. Such 'culturalised' readings of capitalism excuse it from the production and operation of racialised disenfranchisement nationally and globally. This figurative act also brings to mind Jean Baudrillard's concept of seduction, where the visible (or material) is rendered invisible (or symbolic).

This logic animates, in equal measure, the articulation of Hindu cultures of capitalism in the mainstream political language of the BJP and the more explicit cultural fascism of the RSS. It authorises ideologues such as David Frawley to proclaim that the Western capitalist cultures 'ability to truly represent freedom and the individual remains compromised unless it allies itself with a higher spiritual force', which is 'what the Hindu tradition can impart to it' and to declare that the 'the true global age will be one in which science and religion become reconciled'.<sup>45</sup>

This spiritually tempered materialism is aptly described by Frawley as an authentic '*Bharatiya vaishya dharma*' (roughly translated as an 'Indian business ethic') to guide India into the twenty-first century.<sup>46</sup> It articulates the hybridised inflection of both Hindu and business cultural 'essences' in the formation of a syncretic ethic. This 'Hindu ethic' is declared as a challenge to Western 'capitalist, socialist' and 'religious groups', together with their attendant 'destructive behaviour,

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<sup>45</sup> Frawley, p.13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.12.

moral corruption, propaganda distortions, and efforts at world domination'.<sup>47</sup> Its uniqueness, like all cultural nationalist claims, is blatantly overdetermined. Its integration of an essentialised civilisational ethos with capitalist development place it, ideologically, with a cluster of religio-cultural revivalisms which have coincided with intensifications of market liberalisation. It is this phenomenon that Dirlik refers to as to the creation of developing world 'cultures of capitalism' but which can be located in the much broader rightward drift of both intellectual and political formations. In the conceptually incongruous juxtapositions between 'Hindu', 'business' and 'ethic' is a chilling revelation of Hindutva's commitment to sustaining national inequalities in the interests of the cultural elite in whose image its made.

The economic reforms presaged monumental implications for India as a distinctive historical project. If we accept Crane's conviction that 'representations of the economy are part and parcel of specific definitions of a nation', then the fall out of the great historical conjunctures of the early 1990s dismembered the soul of Nehru's India.<sup>48</sup> In the course of a few weeks, Manmohan Singh, with Narasimha Rao's endorsement, 'shifted the nation's centre of gravity'.<sup>49</sup> India could no longer be defined by state socialism but was now identified with advanced capitalism.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>48</sup> George Crane, 'Imagining the Economic Nation: Globalisation in China', *New Political Economy* 4:2 (1999) p.215.

<sup>49</sup> Das, p.226.

<sup>50</sup> This wave carrying India to the right rolled further and deeper into the heart of India's intellectual and political formations than levels of government policy. The rise of the Centre for Development Studies, headed by Rajni Kothari and boasting Ashis Nandy among its number, took place on a culturalist platform, seeking to evolve a scholarly discourse expressive of and articulated in an Indian idiom. This 'indigenisation' was an attempt, in the view of Radhika Desai (2002), to procure the academic mainstream by supplanting the prominence and influence of Marxist scholarship, which commanded the ranks of the Indian Left.

Though it is patently misleading to claim that the Sangh Parivar speaks with one voice on questions of economic nationalism or that the BJP's 'calibrated globalisation' follows edicts from RSS *pracharaks*, it is critical to apprehend that Hindutva's relationship to neo-liberalism is founded on fraternity not coercion.

A discriminatory state that actively sustains symbolic and material inequalities between rightful citizens and national Others is indispensable to the realization of a exclusive Hindu *rashtra*. The NEP is consistent with these aspirations because it enhances the status and financial muscle of Hindutva's constituent communities relative to the progressive disenfranchisement of a racialised poor. To the extent that these outcomes discriminate in favour of the imagined Hindu *rashtra*, and ideologically dovetail with the symbolic demonisation of poor religious minorities, it can be conceived of as a racialising policy.

The motivations of eschewing a class for a 'community' analysis are evident when the elite moorings of Hindutva's cultural nationalism are interrogated. Like all cultural nationalisms, Hindutva imagines the nation with the economically dominant identity within it, which is indisputably that of the predominantly upper caste Hindu capitalist class. Threats to it from the disenfranchised and demonised ethnic minorities who, often form the bulk of the working classes, are managed by diverting class consciousness into the fantasies of a nationalist imagination, weaning them away from the 'progressive projects of socialism and anti-imperialist nationalisms.'<sup>51</sup> A universal feature of cultural nationalism, according to Desai, is to order its 'modernist core of revolution' around its dominant class position:

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<sup>51</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *Of Communalisation and Globalisation : Offensives of the Far Right* (New Delhi: Three Essays Press, 2002) p.12.

In this form, cultural nationalism does provide national ruling classes a sense of their own identity and purpose, as well as a form of legitimisation among the lower orders. (...) Cultural nationalism is, in every country, usually structured around the culture of the economically dominant classes, with higher or lower positions accorded to other groups within the nation relative to it. These positions correspond, on the whole, to their economic positions, and as such, it provides the dominant classes, and concentric circles of their allies, with a collective national identity.<sup>52</sup>

The social compulsion for Hindu nationalism – particularly over the last twenty-five years – has therefore been staged in correspondence with the growing prominence of the economically dominant classes in whose image Hindutva is made and whose interests it serves.<sup>53</sup>

Global capitalism, domesticated by the BJP into a cultural energy serving to invigorate the Hindu *rashtra*, has nurtured a massive internal bourgeoisie which has swelled year on year in the era of the New Economic Policy. India's elite has been the chief beneficiaries of the NEP. Poverty, meanwhile, (in real terms) has been so

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<sup>52</sup> Desai, p.36.

<sup>53</sup> Dirlik's taxonomy of 'first worlds in third worlds' captures not only the reproduction of global inequalities at national levels, but the collaborative role of transnational capital in sustaining the power base of national elites. So although the 'best option for Global Capitalism's control is (...) through the creation of classes amenable to incorporation into or alliance with global capital', it is a reciprocal gesture, given the dependence of the national bourgeois on foreign capital.

inadequately managed that it has failed to decline in the 13 years since the reforms were inaugurated.

The BJP has positioned itself at the heart of the neo-liberal consensus. Having depicted Congress socialism as anti-modernist as well as anti-nationalist, and in place of its crumbling economic vision, the BJP conjured the seductive prospect of a technologically progressive, consumer friendly nation anchored by a vibrant and resolutely sovereign culture for the consuming middle classes:

BJP stands for a modern and progressive India, open to new ideas, new technology and fresh capital. A modern India to the BJP is not a westernized India; a pale copy of the Western economic models.<sup>54</sup>

The neo-liberal turn took place against the evolving transparency between the economic interests of Hindutva's core constituencies – the petty bourgeois and middle classes – at the levels of both rhetoric and policy.<sup>55</sup> The growing vociferousness of the latter demographic, and its hunger for upwardly mobile consumption, meant they were the principal actors 'pushing the politicians to liberalise and globalise'.<sup>56</sup>

The Sangh Parivar were able to articulate these consumerist desires as part of the nationalist imaginary by virtue of a subtle narrative which sought to domesticate the public currency of the concepts of 'globalisation' and 'liberalisation'. I have argued

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<sup>55</sup> 'The BJP wants to strengthen its links to the more cosmopolitan and consuming middle class who, it is assumed, are in favour of the reforms', Hansen, 'Globalisation and Nationalism', p.613.

<sup>56</sup> Das, p.287.



that this was sought by expressing capitalism as an instrumental and 'culturalised' essence. Woven together, this has been the logic of what we might term a Hindu 'culture of capitalism', driven by a highly autonomous bourgeois bloc happy to surrender the ambition of an idealistic 'Third World' liberated from structural dependence.

The size, shape and character of this first world formation are heavily contested by those who would either seek to fly the NEP flag or denounce it. Gurcharan Das, by way of obvious example, applauds the 'rise and rise of the middle class' as the democratisation of the Indian economy and the indices of India's unbound development. Through their 'dynamism', 'social mobility' and 'consumerism', the middle classes vivify the opportunities made possible once the dead hand of 'License Raj' was lifted from an immiserated India. But Das' descriptions are problematic because he fails to distinguish between the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, and because he aggregates them into a consumerist category rather than into distinguishable socio-economic classes. In fact, Das assigns middle class status on the strength of consumption by following the example of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) to benchmark a specific level and quality of consumer spending.<sup>57</sup>

Achin Vanaik and Praful Bidwai (2000), who speak in conspicuous opposition to the NEP, insist that middle class growth is more accurately understood as the dilation of the upper crust of Indian society.<sup>58</sup> The distinction is significant rather than merely semantic. While Das excitedly talks up India's economic miracle, they

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Praful Bidwai & Achin Vanaik, *New Nukes: India, Pakistan and Global Nuclear Disarmament* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2000) p.136.

regard the NEP era with greater circumspection. For them it represents less of a national revolution and more like an entrenched bifurcation between India's fortunate and unfortunate where the former are culturally 'culturally, economically, and politically' 'closer to Northern elites and their own kin in North America and Europe' but alienated from the poorer, less educated and less globalised latter.<sup>59</sup> This alienation is the thin edge of an effectively racialised disparity which threatens to make the fracture of the dispossessed and proprietary unbridgeable.<sup>60</sup>

The alienation also has to be historicized in the context of majoritarian reprisals for supposed minority appeasement in the 1980s and 1990s. The 'mandalisation' of state policy, preceded by the 'plebianisation' of democratic structures, incited a growing middle class resentment towards India's poor.

The supposed beneficiaries of Nehruvian socialism were regarded as recipients of state largesse and impediments to Middle India's aspiration to capitalist parity with the developed world. Increasing reservations for public sector jobs and university places were viewed as unnecessary social engineering that undermined natural

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Despite differences of opinion on the dimensions and nature of this change, it remains undisputable that the economic map of the nation has been redrawn over the past. In the rural hinterlands and the cities, consumer expenditure was rising at exponential rates, particularly during the 1980s. The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (1992) announced that 'there has been a 90% per cent increase in average family incomes (...) during the 1983-90 period'. The rise of 'ruppies', rural upwardly mobile persons, demonstrated that India's new found wealth was not concentrated in the metropolis but was within reach of the small town and village. It is from this increasing purchasing power that many Indian families were upgraded to 'middle class' status. The rising classes were likely to own TVs (almost 30 million in the 1980s), a car (production multiplied five times in the 1980s) or a motor scooter, and a refrigerator (nearly four times). According to India Today, middle class status was also attributable to those who had embraced the new political culture and acquired a 'bias against the poor'. They were 'Rajiv Gandhi's people, at home in a new political climate, happy with the new political climate, happy with the new jargon, relieved that the Government no longer tries to tax everyone in the name of the poor, enamoured of a prime minister who understands the importance of colour TV'. 'S.Dubey. 'The middle class', in L. Gordon and P. Oldenburg (eds) *India Briefing 1992* (Boulder: Westview and The Asia Society, 1992), p.138.

societal meritocracy. While Das celebrated the 1991 reforms as the unshackling of the Indian economic 'elephant', other social commentators look back on that moment (perhaps together with the Mandal report) as the dawn of an ideological backlash against the poor and the justification for the pursuit for individual wealth.

Middle class alienation from Congress ideology reached its apotheosis with the acceptance of the Mandal report by V.P. Singh's Congress administration in 1991.<sup>61</sup> Perceptions of Congress pandering to religious minorities and backward castes - who coincidentally form the bulk of India's poor - had been inflamed by the concession to Muslim fundamentalists by Rajiv Gandhi in the Shah Bano case<sup>62</sup> but truly reached a watershed in 1991. On the recommendation of the Second Backward Classes Commission (the Mandal Commission), Singh announced a 27% reservation of jobs in the central government services and public institutions for 'socially and educationally backward classes', aside and separate from the 22.5 % allocated to Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Implemented publicly in the service of 'social justice', the Mandal commission broke the back of middle class patience with left wing ideologies of any hue.

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<sup>61</sup> 'Significantly, the coverage given by all the national dailies to the agitation against the Mandal report, which argued for reservations in jobs for backward castes, was much more intense than that given over to the anti-Muslim riots. Between August and September 1990 alone, the Indian Express devoted 12.81 times as much space to anti-Mandal agitation as to the riots (though six times as many lives were lost in the riots as in the agitation).' Charu Gupta and Mukul Sharma, 'Communal Constructions: media reality v real reality', *Race & Class* 38:1 (1996) p5.

<sup>62</sup> In 1987, Rajiv Gandhi passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, having opposed the legislation in 1985 and 1986. It followed immediately in the wake of the Shah Bano affair, when the aforementioned Muslim divorcee had successfully sued her husband for alimony in India's civil courts. The Bill protected the rights of Muslim husbands to withhold alimony payments in accordance with *shariat* and not secular law. Speculation on Gandhi's volte face include the considerations of upcoming local elections in Muslim majority areas, and the rising Muslim assertiveness in the face of an increasing tide of Hindu nationalism.

The anti-poor bias was therefore just one arm of a comprehensive assault on the Nehruvian consensus. The BJP in particular brought business classes with 'the people' as a whole together as victims of a misconceived political arrangement known as 'Nehruvianism'. In an interview with Thomas Blom Hansen in the early 1990s, a lower middle class Maharastrian family lamented on a perceived gamble on socialism which has only further impoverished India:

'while so many other countries in the world prosper, India lags behind and is even forced to ask foreign companies to upgrade even basic elements in the technical and organisational infrastructure of Indian industrial production. Betting on socialism, planning and friendly relations with the Communist bloc has been a major historical miscalculation executed by a corrupt and incompetent political leadership. In the meantime, the global development has overtaken and bypassed India'.<sup>63</sup>

Pavan Varma (1998) is one of those who see in the new middle classes 'a crippling ideological barrenness which threatens to convert India into a vastly unethical and insensitive aggregation of wants.' Varma's pessimistic assessment of the Indian middle classes draws on his perception of an absent ideological compass with which to guide social actions. Into this ideological vacuum, the overpowering drive for personal wealth and the rush for consumer goods has replaced what he

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with middle class Maharastrian family, quoted in Hansen, 'Ethics of Hindutva', p.298.



terms the social consciousness bequeathed by the 'Gandhi-Nehru legacy' as the engine of middle class behaviour.<sup>64</sup> Varma contends that this legacy imparted social sensitivity, and an 'unambiguous ethical imperative as a powerful attempt to counter the fragmented and individualistic vision of the educated Indian'.<sup>65</sup> Hansen (1999) historicises this renunciation of socialist goals:

This assertive and self-confident urban middle class discarded socialist rhetoric and Gandhian temperance and wanted India to fall in tune with global trends as fast as possible. The improved access to jobs and consumption, tax-relaxation and increased access to private ownership of stocks, made the urban middle classes feel that they had joined the global modernisation and were joining the modern world on

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<sup>64</sup> This legacy, (of which Nehruvianism represented only the behaviour of the State) Varma contends, imparted social sensitivity, and an 'ambiguous ethical imperative as a powerful attempt to counter the fragmented and individualistic vision of the educated Indian.' Varma condenses the Gandhi-Nehru legacy into five shared values for shared behaviour:

'an acceptance of the role of ethics in society, probity in public life, and the link between politics and idealism; a belief in the vision of an industrialised India, rational and scientific in outlook and modern in the Western sense of the term; a social sensitivity towards the poor, a belief that the state and society must work towards their upliftment; a reticence towards ostentatious displays of wealth, which was seen as something in bad taste and incongruent in a country as poor as India; an acceptance of the goal of self-reliance, reflecting an optimism in India's intrinsic economic strengths and the political need to be insulated from external manipulation; a belief in a secular state, above religious divides.' Pandey (1992) observes that by the early 1990s, this legacy was in tatters, describing it as 'a world that has passed, or nearly so. There is little concern for education today, let alone the education of the disadvantaged and the poor (...) The entire ruling class in India (as, again, in so much of the rest of the world) appears to have been won over by this wonderful vision. So much so that, as a commentator pointed out in the Times of India, not a trace of the language of welfare nor even of a reference to the poor is to be found anywhere in the Union Budget of 1992.' Pavan Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (New Delhi : Viking, 1998) p.129. Pandey, p.15.

<sup>65</sup> Varma, p.131.



increasingly equal terms and along increasingly similar cultural patterns of consumption.<sup>66</sup>

The policies of economic liberalisation have licensed the emerging creed of social Darwinism which has seen the middle classes attempt to ruthlessly sinew the poles between themselves and the destitute even further. Varma argues that the NEP ‘deadened even further any remaining sense of concern in it for the disadvantaged’, and ‘gave a flamboyant ideological justification for the creation of two Indias, one aspiring to be globalised, and the other hopelessly, despairingly marginalized’.<sup>67</sup>

But what Varma’s mournful and occasionally moralistic lament is blind to – pulling his account into sympathy with Gurcharan Das’ – is recognition of the fraternity between Hindutva and neo-liberalism. For all their obvious differences, they ultimately find themselves in agreement: while Das talks up the middle classes as being ‘non-ideological’ ‘pragmatic and result-orientated’<sup>68</sup>, Varma sees the polity as tragically ‘devoid of an ideology that can inspire a larger vision’.<sup>69</sup>

Both fail to register that the middle classes are saturated with the imaginings of the Hindu *rashtra*, and that this larger vision is perfectly amenable to their interests. Though decidedly a partial, elitist vision of the nation that has ‘never been equivalent to the expression of national identity of India or Indians’, its efforts have

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<sup>66</sup> Hansen, ‘Ethics of Hindutva’, pp.296-297.

<sup>67</sup> Varma, p.183.

<sup>68</sup> Das, p.285.

<sup>69</sup> Varma, p.202.

been directed to 'make its parochial concerns grandly stand in for the totality of Indian nationalism' and so 'the Sangh Parivar does present a hegemonic project'.<sup>70</sup>

Jaffrelot (1996) likewise believes that the BJP were all the more successful because of their constructed vision of a modern India, and due to the fact their politics were so deeply ideologically anchored.<sup>71</sup> They were 'the sole proponent of a political project– the building of a strong India'.<sup>72</sup> It is Hindutva which stokes the fires of the middle classes' majoritarianism, provides rationale for the bias against the poor, and manages dissent from below. Inheriting existing structures of hegemony, Hindutva frames the nation in the image of its dominant classes and attributes all social problems to demonised minorities as threats to 'the nation'. Because of its cultural definition of India, its organs have branded the socialist as 'unIndian' and slandered the dissident Left as 'resident non-Indians'.<sup>73</sup>

For all the multiple ways in which socialists and socialism have been cast as national Others this has remained symbolic rather than substantive. To draw on a distinction well made by Sivanandan (2001), the 'rhetoric of demonisation' may be racist but the 'politics of exclusion', experienced by the poor, are economic.<sup>74</sup> These exclusions manifest themselves in the 'infra-citizenship' that Chetan Bhatt (2004) observes as characterising the relationship between federal and central states and the poor populace.

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<sup>70</sup> Bhatt, pp.210-211.

<sup>71</sup> India's current prime and deputy ministers, (of the BJP), Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, were both schooled in RSS camps and were prominent leaders of the organisation in the 1960s and 1970s .

<sup>72</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s* (New Delhi: Viking: 1996) p.433.

<sup>73</sup> Desai, p.121.

<sup>74</sup> A. Sivanandan, 'Poverty is the New Black', *Race & Class*, 43:2 (2001) p.2.

India now spends less per capita on health than it did half a century ago. Public health services are on the verge of collapse while private hospitals flourish. Primary education, where India lags behind sections of sub-Saharan Africa, is beyond one third of its children. Elsewhere, an enlarged military budget has drained state funding for schools.<sup>75</sup>

If the basic sustenance of human life itself has been withdrawn during the ascendancy of the NEP then in the apartheid between rich and poor, where demographic minorities assume the role of democratic majorities, lies a crisis of 'genuinely democratic citizenship'.<sup>76</sup> The deprivation of opportunities for secular activity translates into the entrenchment of communal segregation, a phenomenon as apparent in the urban wastelands of Burnley and Oldham as in the slums of Godhra or Ahmedabad. This goes to the heart of Ashutosh Varshney's (2002) correlation between socio-economic interdependence and communal peace.<sup>77</sup> These deep lying structural exclusions pre-emptively deny the universalisation of substantive let alone active citizenship, and with it the aspirations for a national human rights culture.

For citizen-action to be made in transformative confrontation with the majoritarian nexus between neo-liberalism and Hindutva, pedagogies and praxis of resistance have to register the complexities of contemporary oppression and deprivation rather than reductively diagnosing every social affliction as a symptom of cultural imperialism.

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<sup>75</sup> Bidwai, 'World Social Forum'.

<sup>76</sup> Bhatt, p.145.

<sup>77</sup> This correlation will be discussed further in the chapter on Indian secularism. See chapter 5, 'Politicising Minority'.

The remainder of the thesis will analyse how the Left has addressed the various crises of citizenship in Britain and India and the dependency of mainstream struggles against fascism and racism on liberal forms of multiculturalism and secularism. Chapter 3 will return to the idea of political education via a discussion of communitarian articulations of responsibility by arguing that these are critically blind to questions of racialised disenfranchisement, such as those occurring under the New Economic Policy and New Labour's neo-assimilationism.

## Community Spirit: Postcolonial Rehabilitations of Responsibility and Political Education

- Producing generations of nice, tolerant, well-off, secure, other respecting students of [the American] sort in all parts of the world is just what is needed – indeed all that is needed – to achieve an Enlightenment utopia. The more youngsters like that we can raise, the stronger and more global our human rights culture will become. Richard Rorty, ‘Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality’ (1993)
- Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (...) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanisation. Paolo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968)

In 1997 the InterAction Council, comprised of former heads of state, released the ‘ethical’ corollary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), the



Universal Declaration of Human Responsibility.<sup>1</sup> The former is invoked as the bearer of human rights standards and the basis for human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Political Rights. It continues to furnish the lexicon from which human rights enunciations derive their meaning. In the same year, Nelson Mandela announced his obligation to the UNDHR, narrating its galvanising force for the anti-apartheid movement. He spoke of it as ‘a shining beacon, and an inspiration to many millions of South Africans’.<sup>2</sup> It is in the daunting shadow of the UNDHR that the declaration made its entry onto the global stage.

The introductory text to the declaration notes that ‘traditionally’ we have spoken of human rights, and gone a long way in their international recognition, continuing that, ‘it is now time to initiate an equally important quest for the acceptance of human duties or obligations’.<sup>3</sup>

They propose that rights and responsibility are ‘interdependent, balancing the notions of freedoms and responsibility’. They argue that from the Enlightenment onwards, the West has been associated with rights and individualism while the notions of responsibility and community have prevailed in the East.<sup>4</sup> The declaration goes on to warn that:

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<sup>1</sup> The latter has only been drafted, not officially admitted into the body of UN documents.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson Mandela quoted in Amnesty International, *Muddying the waters, The Draft ‘Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities’: No complement to human rights*, April 1998, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Interaction Council, A ‘Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities’, *International Human Rights in Context* (eds) Henry J. Steiner and Philip Alston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp351-3.

<sup>4</sup> The impetus to draft a UN Declaration of Human Responsibility, based on this reasoning, would appear to be drawn from the *Bangkok Declaration of Asian States* (1995), which insisted on the desire

Without a proper balance, unrestricted freedom is as dangerous as imposed social responsibility. Great social injustices have resulted from extreme economic freedom and capitalist greed, while at the same time; cruel oppression of people's basic liberties has been justified in the name of society's interests or communist ideals.<sup>5</sup>

Though the InterAction council would have liked the declaration to be considered as a complement to the UNDHR, it was rounded on by heavyweight actors in the international human rights movement. Amnesty International responded that introducing the language of responsibility contributed little to the advance of human rights except 'muddying the waters.' Their report contested the hopes of the declaration's authors that it would complement existing human rights instruments by countering that it merely fostered their 'weakening', undermining the UNHDR by manner of reckless excision, generalisation and the 'introduction of vague and ill-defined concepts.'<sup>6</sup> Amnesty's outspoken assault on the InterAction Council's proposal testifies to the historical opposition between rights and responsibility.

In this chapter, I will seek to rehabilitate responsibility by rearticulating it as a collective right. In so doing I hope to reconcile the ethics of multiculturalism with the promotion of human rights culture. In the opening half of the chapter, I examine orthodox presentations of responsibility as a community ethic, critically reading

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of Southern countries for human rights enunciations to be culturally sensitive, arguing, as Parekh or Carens might, that each societal culture is in possession of its own moral vocabulary.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, p.1.

Amitai Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community* (1995). I then proceed to address the deficiencies of his moral understanding of responsibility, first by considering the application of communitarian logic to the question of global obligations in Bhikhu Parekh's 'Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship' (2003), and then by developing a politicised articulation of responsibility from Gayatri Spivak's *Imperatives to Re-Imagine the Planet* (1999), and 'Righting Wrongs' (2003). I conclude by harnessing Spivak's insights to the question of political education for the racially oppressed.

I'm going to locate the antagonism between rights and responsibility in the moral, political and ontological opposition between the individual and the community. The discourse of rights is characteristically (and I will argue wrongly) identified with the primacy of individuals as atomic entities, whereas the discourse of responsibility refers to the behaviour of individuals *in* community. The ethical tension between rights and responsibility can therefore be understood as derivative of a contradiction between the sovereignty of the individual and the community, a contradiction typified by the ideological privileges of the liberal and the communitarian.

Liberal histories of rights emphasise the contradictions between responsibilities and human liberty and the coincidence between rights and freedom. The unfettered endowment and enjoyment of rights are believed to be synonymous with the rolling back of repressive government and synchronous with the evolution of democratic cultures. The regime of human rights, guaranteed by democracy and underwritten by constitutions, are said to have ushered in an enlightened era free from the wanton exercise of tyrannical rule. Rights act as guardians of the individual, protecting us from responsibilities (arbitrarily) imposed by the community.

Through this absolutising interpretative prism, where rights are the expression and evidence of human freedom, responsibility is evoked as the conceptual image of societal unfreedom, coercion and patriarchal dictat. Responsibility speaks of the stipulated roles of feudalism, casteism, and patriarchy.<sup>7</sup> It becomes twinned with a very regressive idea of community interested in the suppression of individual freedom, a freedom understood in terms of a set of rights.

On the other side, an enlightened view of community prevails, based on the inherently worthy principles of cooperation, mutuality and common interest. Where these values exist, the doctrine of rights can be dispensed with. Rights discourse, by contrast, ontologically neglects the affective social relations between people by assuming and breeding an adversarial conception of society. Rights are therefore socially debilitating, corroding interdependence and preoccupied with the fulfilment of individual aims without due regard for the consequences of individualistic ambitions on the 'common good'.

These (admittedly typological) hostilities beg a concern for the abandonment of community in liberal political culture and circumspection towards rights in communitarian political culture. Since it is the concept of rights which is favoured in contemporary establishment viewpoints, I will run through the dynamics of its ascendancy, its relation to communities and grassroots activism.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Within the rights camp, the history of something like responsibility-based cultural systems is generally given as part of the progress towards the development of a rights-based systems in the type case of the European self.' Gayatri Spivak, 'Righting Wrongs', in, in Nicholas Owen (ed) *Human Rights, Human Wrongs* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2003) p.167. Henceforth referred to as *RW*.

According to Upendra Baxi (2002) our current era will undoubtedly be recalled as an 'Age of Human Rights'.<sup>8</sup> The proliferation of human rights enforced by national and supranational bodies has collectively constituted what Boutros Boutros Ghali, former Secretary General of the United Nations, has termed 'a common language of humanity'.<sup>9</sup> Baxi invokes Gouldner's imagining of ideology as a set of languages characterised by reflexivity - as a 'sociolect' – to declare that human rights are the emancipatory desires of our epoch. Their potential rests with the unheralded, 'inestimable' universality of their scope:

Human rights languages are perhaps all that we have to interrogate the barbarism of power, even when these remain inadequate to fully humanize the practices of politics of cruelty.<sup>10</sup>

The currency of this 'sociolect' is driven by its popular appropriation as 'insurrectionary praxis' from below and its employment as the 'grammar of global governance' from above. Its installation from both elite stations and grassroots has made 'rights-talk' expressive of myriad political desires. Support for this view arrives from Claude Lefort (1986):

Their effectiveness (that of rights) stems from the allegiance that is given them, and this allegiance is bound up with a way of being in society, which cannot be measured by the mere preservation of

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<sup>8</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.3.



acquired benefits. In short, rights cannot be dissociated from the awareness of rights: this is my first observation (...) My main purpose was to bring out the symbolic dimension of human rights and to show that it has become a constitutive element of political society.<sup>11</sup>

In the first instance, human rights are seized as an aspirational horizon for those excluded from full citizenship on cultural, gendered, racialised or economic grounds. For such groups and their movements, the struggle for human rights is a struggle for the *recognition* of their humanity.

Baxi cites the anti-apartheid, national independence, and gender equality movements as exemplary of groundswells which convene 'human rights' as an arena of transformational political practice. It attains the name of insurrectionary praxis by virtue of the counter-ideological promise; it is expressive of rights' signification as an 'ethical imperative.'

At the distant end of the scale, rights sustain (and are sustained by) structures of governance. These, in turn, draw their legitimacy from the grammatical intelligibility of rights. Baxi cites a number of rights which can only be fulfilled by governance, such as the right to constitute government through periodic full and fair elections, self-determination through at least genuine modes of devolved power, identity rights, and the rights to cultural and physical survival.<sup>12</sup>

Human rights are the skeleton on which the democratic society and its institutional organs hang. Since the discursivity of human rights is universal, it

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<sup>11</sup> Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985) p.259.

<sup>12</sup> Baxi, p.8.

grammatically coheres the local, national and global in escalating network of government. In so far as it discursively embeds itself in civil society, 'invaginating' modes of political and social behaviour, human rights can be said to approach the features of a culture.

The consolidation of human rights from groundswells of struggles and global discursivity into a sociolect is not free of contradictions, a point realised through Baxi's distinction between a politics *of* human rights and a politics *for* human rights. The politics of human rights instrumentally deploys the symbolic or cultural capital of human rights to manage the national and global distributions of power until it becomes little more than an alibi for 'the pursuit of politics, and even aggression and war by other means'. It becomes associated with the 'terroristic repression of realms of human autonomy and expression, where dissent becomes subversion and the sycophancy of the ruling ideology the commanding height of free expression; and international diplomacy deftly uses in this form of politics visions of global futures for the production of ideological compliance'.<sup>13</sup> The cost of its 'sociolectic' standing is borne by those who are aspirationally constructed as its greatest beneficiaries, those are disconnected from the machineries of its discursive production and who are its most genuine midwives. In fact, to some degree, the politics *of* human rights can only take place by suppressing the politics *for* human rights; 'heavily parasitic on human suffering' and the dematerialized and ghostly foreclosure of the real birthplaces of human rights.<sup>14</sup> As I will show later on, Spivak argues that this is enabled by the rationalization of responsibility as obligation,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.,p.41.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.,p.40.

universalized by the suppression of subaltern cultures of responsibility. The 'interpenetration of the global institutionalisation of human rights' with that of the politics for human rights is therefore less of a mutually beneficial convergence around the aspiration for social justice and more a 'parasitic' exchange between the powerful and the powerless who experience 'suffering'.

On the other hand, human rights culture cannot assume legitimacy without respect for societal understandings of what it means 'to be human', however. Human rights regimes are therefore riven by contestation around 'universality' and 'particularism'. Human rights culture does not deputise for societal culture, and the reverse that does not hold either. The 'mutuality of determination' between global human rights to societal cultures cannot be crudely reduced to the singularity of one above the other or to a trivial acknowledgement of reciprocity between of one to the other.

No societal culture can exist bereft of a notion of human rights, simply because all societies intuitively evolve ideas of what it means to be human and how human life should be protected. Global human rights cultures in turn are blooded by their synergistic collision with societal cultures. The 'lifeless instruments' of the human rights regime are only vivified through activism, acted out in instances of 'multicultural translation', constituting the sites where human rights are activated as local practices. The local, not the global, remains the crucial site of struggle for the enunciation, implementation, enjoyment and exercise of human rights.<sup>15</sup> For Baxi this means that the 'human rights sociolect' can only legitimately assume its stature

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.89.

as a 'common language of humanity' when conceived of not as 'a culture of no cultures', but intensely multicultural, as 'a culture of many cultures'.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the near hegemony that Baxi (along with human rights 'evangelists' such as Shulamith Koenig) imputes to the human rights, others are more circumspect about its emancipatory capital. It is the very ascendancy of the human rights regime that they would point to as counter intuitive to emancipation and ill suited to bear 'the mission and burden of human destiny'.<sup>17</sup>

Communitarian theory's principal disagreements with liberal theories is not with the ethical content of human rights (with which it broadly agrees) but more to the insufficiency of that ethic, its penetration of every cell of the social tissue, and its implications for the social praxis of communitarian life.

Their adversarial conception of the relationship between rights and community is based on the conviction that rights disable responsibility and lead to weak societies. The overproduction of rights and its saturation as a kind of common sense or cultural reflex has obscured the interdependencies that make for just societies able to co-operatively realise common aspirations.

By way of example, Amitai Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community* expresses a contrary opinion on the ethical balance between rights and responsibilities. Feted by the Clinton regime and self-regarded a sign of the times, it is the most recognisably political programme to rein in what he perceives to be the wanton, hedonistic abuse of rights and its appropriation to a self-centred consumer culture. Communitarianism

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>17</sup> Baxi, cited in Shulamith Koenig, *Human Rights Education, Human Rights Culture and the Community of Non-Governmental Organisations: The Birth of a Political Ideology for the Twenty-First Century*. Available at: <<http://www.pdhre.org>>. Accessed: 12 February 2003.

originated as a philosophical critique of liberalism and its excesses in libertarian legal philosophy, and its leading advocates are exclusively academics.<sup>18</sup> In conspicuous antagonism to Baxi, Etzioni proclaims responsibility, not rights, to be the harbinger of a more just world.

*The Spirit of Community* is the proselytising manifesto of Etzioni's Communitarian movement. Communitarianism hails itself as the recovery of America's moral voice:

We adopted the name Communitarianism to emphasize that the time had come to attend to our responsibilities, to the conditions and elements that we share, to the community.<sup>19</sup>

It rails against what it perceives to be American morality's progressive atrophy, blaming the erosion of the social fabric on the supremacy of rights as cultural common sense. The Communitarian Agenda addresses itself to what its proponents observe as a surfeit of individualism and a weakening of collective fellowship, or what Etzioni dumbs down to the aphorism of a 'severe case of deficient we-ness'.<sup>20</sup>

He argues that immersion in a rights-orientated culture has made it impossible for Americans to even imagine responsibilities to other citizens. This has fomented two chronic debilitations in the body politic: a poverty of civic virtues and a crippling

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<sup>18</sup> Adam Crawford, 'The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda', *Journal of Law and Society* 23 (2) (1996), p.250.

<sup>19</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda* (London: Fontana Press, 1995) p.15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.26.



culture of claims and dependency on the state. Etzioni proposes that redressing the former will ameliorate the pressure on the former.

He discerns a trend towards socially responsible citizenship in American society. Sobriety checks, anti-loitering laws and drug checkpoints, all previously anathema to a rights-centric society, are now increasingly populating the social landscape. He cites these as examples of how small contributions by each of us can provide major benefits for all.<sup>21</sup>

This trend points Etzioni to the conclusion that a culture of responsibility is on the horizon and increasingly palatable to a society gorged on a diet of incessantly bloating rights. Etzioni prescribes his own measures to cultivate these values further. To this end, he proposes the implementation of compulsory national service for all school leavers to serve as an 'antidote to the ego-centred mentality' and as a 'grand sociological mixer' for developing shared values among people from different racial, class and religious backgrounds.<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately though, Etzioni tries to convince us that the most sustainable means to transmit social responsibility rests with the devolution of moral authority from the state to civil community.<sup>23</sup> The community, he tells us, 'speak to us in moral voices. They lay claims on their members. Indeed, they are the most important sustaining source of moral voices other than the inner self'.<sup>24</sup> The restoration of the moral voice of communities (and the 'web of social bonds, the communitarian nexus that

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Kahne, "The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda," *Harvard Educational Review* 66.4 (1996) p.8467.

<sup>22</sup> Etzioni, p.168.

<sup>23</sup> Crawford, p.236.

<sup>24</sup> Etzioni, p.31.

enables us to speak as a community') is the catalyst for an expanded chain of peer pressure with which to renew America's sense of moral responsibility.<sup>25</sup>

The Communitarian agenda sets out its opposition to state-driven moral authority by arguing that while the rights discourse inhibits social cohesion, the community, by drawing people into mutual interdependence, cultivates higher orders of care and accountability. While the state can only deploy *coercive* authority on citizens to behave responsibly, the community acts with the gentle arts of moral suasion where 'people generally agree with one another about what is to be done and are encouraged to live up to these agreements'.<sup>26</sup>

If community morality bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the second coming of Puritanism, Etzioni assures us that suasion only offers a humane alternative to recourse to state machinery. Suasion, at most, would take the form of rebuke and reproach for individuals to observe 'those values we all hold dear', voluntarily observed by the majority.<sup>27</sup> 'Suasion is the acceptable face of community, coercion the unacceptable'.<sup>28</sup>

It is the suasive voice of community that is preferential to legislation, which does not guide behaviour, but swathes its directions in a morass of rights. He counsels us that rights 'do not automatically make for rightness'.<sup>29</sup> He suggests that the existence of rights is tacitly supposed to signify not only their legality but also their inherent beneficence. Acts of law are therefore inadequate motors of moral chastisement since they mislead citizens into conceiving their entitlements as worthy courses of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,p.10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,p.44.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.201.

action to be pursued with restraint or reproach. Etzioni reasons that it is only the suasive power of community - the civic religion of responsibility - which can plug the moral vacuum of rights talk.

It's not impossible to make connections between Etzioni's Communitarianism and Parekh's social horizon for multiethnic Britain.<sup>30</sup> After all, both employ the phrase 'community of communities' to aphorise their aspirations. Parekh is, of course, a pronounced communitarian himself. In fact, as I will discuss later, much of the disquiet around *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000), even from outspoken multicultural advocates and Runnymede Report co-authors such as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2001) centred on Parekh's insistence that community looms large both in the social imaginary and the individual consciousness. Others, such as Yack (2001)

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<sup>30</sup> There are important distinctions to be drawn between the secularity of Parekh and Etzioni's communitarianism. Etzioni's communitarian message has been taken up as a rallying cry to reassert America's national identity. The regeneration of core values that collectively constitute Americanness, to bind the nation in cohesion has been identified as the essence of community spirit. Despite Etzioni's exhortations to 'sub-national collectivities', he continually reassert the centrifugal impact of cohesive communities on the renewal of American national spirit. If anything, the proliferation of diversified interests, otherwise derided as 'lobbies of self-interest' are counter-intuitive to the primary ambition of strengthening common interests. His manifesto preaches the suppression of diversity, not its expression. His pleadings for community are defined in secular, voluntaristic terms. Where Parekh instrumentally deploys community to preserve cultural difference, Etzioni coaxes us into communities of our own making. He speaks of neighbourhoods, clubs, associations and other voluntary organisations. The initiative lies with our voluntary participation in the community, just as the desires to act in the collective interest, to uphold those values 'dear to most of us', are done under no coercive duress. Parekh's communitarian message, on the hand, is couched firmly in the discursive idiom of multiculturalism. It is premised on the assumption that the societal acceptance of community supposes the ideological triumph of cultural diversity. Here, the community is figured not as the home of 'narrative, cohesion and coherence', but as the expression of difference and plurality. Parekh is not concerned with the resuscitation of British nationalism. He seeks, instead, the nation's re-articulation as a catholic shelter for a diversity of cultural perspectives, united in their commitment to the principle of diversity itself. The common interest of multicultural Britain, as Parekh judges it, is to uphold 'the spirit of multiculturalism', which does not approximate into the singularity of 'the spirit of community'. Multicultural communities are not voluntaristic in the sense expounded by Etzioni, but the 'networks, institutions and practices which give sustenance to our cultural selves'. Their behaviour is not prescribed, predictable or orchestrated towards the regulation of social values.

were taken aback by his attempts to foist communal duty onto people, citing his directive for us to 'preserve and pass on to succeeding generations what they think valuable in it.'<sup>31</sup>

There is an assumption at work throughout *Rethinking Multiculturalism* that multiculturalism is only viable if we can conserve the integrity of our existing communities. Integral communities, in turn, need to be staunchly policed and constantly nurtured. Without a respect for community borders – the darker side of Yack's dichotomy of 'border-guarding and 'border crossing' – the multiculturalist dream perishes in the prevailing rubble of societal incoherence. For Parekh too, it is communities which perform the crucial educative task of imbuing us with respect, sensitivity and duty, immediately to our familial others, and secondarily to all members of the human race.

Etzioni's communitarianism, like Parekh's, has come under fire from liberals, libertarians and what he sleights as the 'radical-individualists' of the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union). Just as Parekh has been criticised for being insufficiently attentive to dissenting voices in the community, so Etzioni too has been accused of understating the diversity of views in any given community.

Joseph Kahne (1996) reminds us that democratic communities 'require both respect for respect for differences as well as identification of common values'.<sup>32</sup> Etzioni's communitarian message is incapable of imagining the deliberative skills required for citizens from diverse backgrounds to engage with important issues.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000) p.160.

<sup>32</sup> Kahne, p846.

<sup>33</sup> This is where a divergence from Parekh's multiculturalism is most visible. Where Etzioni sidelines democracy in the interests of social responsibility (indeed, one critic draws our attention to the fact



Since he neglects to propose the institution of appropriate forums of deliberation and conflict management, it is true to say that this an under thought aspect of his communitarianism, and one that undermines his attempts to placate those who fear that strong communities, strangling the minority voice, make weak democracies.

The application of communitarian logic to the question of universal obligations is apparent in Parekh's 'Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship' (2003). Tabling responsibility onto public and policy agendas is also a central tenet of Parekhian politics.

In 'Cosmopolitanism' (2003), he discusses the duties we have to those outside our political community and how they can best be performed. Parekh tells us that we've reached a landmark moment in contemporary morality, since our moral obligations now eclipse the parochialism of natural law and Christian moral theories which preached such prurient natural duties such as not to harm and to keep promises.<sup>34</sup>

Global communication has given us a window on the suffering of those beyond our immediate political circle. We have a much keener sense of their suffering, which derive, in principal, from political strife and economic deprivation. Human beings entertain 'certain expectations of one another, especially of those in the affluent and powerful West because of their greater capacity to cause harm and offer help.'<sup>35</sup>

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that the word 'democracy' does not even feature in Spirit of Community's index) Parekh reiterates time and time again that his 'rethought' multiculturalism is geared towards strengthening democratic virtues.

<sup>34</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, 'Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship', *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003), p.11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



Because our interests and desires are agglomerated through the bureaucracies of the nation-state, they have consequently evolved both political and a collective dimensions. Parekh expands on this:

We cannot help them [the global disadvantaged] by acting individually as when we give money to international charities, but only by collectively pressuring our governments to act in appropriate ways. In other words, our duties now have a political content, and our relations to human beings in other parts of the world are politically mediated. This inescapable politicisation of our universal moral duty is new to our age, and forms the central moral premise of any well-conceived theory of politics and international relations.<sup>36</sup>

Drawing attention to two orders of duty, those to the immediate community and those beyond it, he asserts that neither ‘automatically trumps the other’.<sup>37</sup> Though faithful to his ideological conviction in the social cohesiveness of community allegiance, Parekh nonetheless makes determined efforts to relativise these special duties in respect to ‘ordinary’ humanitarian obligations.<sup>38</sup>

He considers that special duties might be only a ‘division of labour’, citing Godwin’s wisdom that they may be no more than an ‘administrative device for

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> We can only speculate whether this ideological shift towards a less communally insular perspective is a judicious accommodation of the criticism levelled at both *Rethinking Multiculturalism* and the Runnymede Report. ‘Cosmopolitanism’ demonstrates a sensitised appreciation of the tension between multiculturalism and human rights cultures, and in terms of its scope, looks to internationalise a harmonised liberal value pluralism.

discharging our general duties more efficiently'.<sup>39</sup> The latter cannot, then, be 'overridden' by the former for the very fact of their derivative nature.

Having identified humankind's genesis of a 'global political community', Parekh also makes the effort to update the moral resonance of responsibility. Whereas Etzioni's *Spirit of Community* advocates the sparing intervention of state offices in moral life, Parekh, like Brennan and Arebuchi (2001) is compelled to return to the nation-state as the ultimate arbiter of executive power. Moral activity which bypasses political activity is an impossible venture in Parekh's reckoning.<sup>40</sup>

It is the levers of democracy that need to be engaged if our moral voices are to be heard, the same institutions through which our collective concerns can be amplified. This rearticulated interface between the local, national and international communities, summoned by the aspiration of a 'globally orientated citizenship', expands the horizon of social responsibility.

Though it would be reductive to simply dismiss Parekh's interventions on global obligations as communitarianism writ large, there are compelling reasons why we should still do so. Written into his argument are the assumptions that the proliferation of rights is ethically insufficient to alleviate global suffering and that community is experienced as a community of duties and not of rights.

In fact his argument is a remarkable inversion of Allan Gewirth's *A Community of Rights* (1996). In that work Gewirth conciliates rights and community by debunking a succession of communitarian presumptions that have denied the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>40</sup> At this level, Parekh puts further distance between himself and the irrational anti-modernism put forth by Ashis Nandy's critical traditionalism, and to a lesser extent, T N Madan's critique of scientific secularism.

possibility of engendering mutuality through the rights concept. Foundational to Gewirth's argument is the distinction between positive and negative rights, where the former refer to individuals' rightful entitlements and the latter to their rightful defences (examples of each are the right to vote and the right *not* to be murdered).

The wellspring of mutuality in the rights concept is the interpellated obligation to respect the negative rights of others; recognising the negative rights in others delimits our behaviour so we don't infringe them. An affirmative synergy exists between rights and community 'because the concept of human rights entails a mutualist and egalitarian universality: each human must respect the rights of all the others while having his rights respected by others, so that there must be a mutual sharing of the benefits of rights and the burdens of duties'.<sup>41</sup>

Parekh takes this idea of positive and negative rights and applies them to duties, actively denying that these responsibilities derive from negative rights. Instead these positive and negative duties are said to derive from our common humanity and compassion. Negative 'duties' are identical to the obligations called into being by negative rights, namely obligations not 'to inflict evils on others and damage their ability to pursue their well-being'. The implications of negative duties are a refrain from the pursuit of our own interests in 'a manner that harms theirs', or more generally to 'use them as a mere means to our ends, treat them as if they were worthless, humiliate and manipulate them, trample upon their self-respect, or take advantage of their weakness and vulnerability'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Alan Gewirth, *The Community of Rights* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p6.

<sup>42</sup> Parekh, 'Cosmopolitanism', p.6

Positive duties are (unsurprisingly) the mirror image of negative duties and require intervention instead of refrain. These are duties to 'alleviate suffering' and to offer such help, as they need 'within the limits of our abilities and resources.' Though acknowledging that individual well-being is the responsibility of the individual, their disability through 'unfortunate circumstances, bad luck, poor upbringing, disturbed lives, lack of resources', over which they have little control, necessitate external intervention. Positive duties arise in the absence of positive rights, but Parekh prefers to explain their existence as a response to 'their claims as human beings', a matter of 'justice not charity'.<sup>43</sup>

Parekh's community is realized not through the recognition of universal rights, but that of universal responsibility. Like the politics *of* human rights, it is parasitic on human suffering. It is only our 'concern' for the 'suffering of unknown others' that Parekh believes is drawing us into an 'unmistakeable' sense of our 'global moral community'.<sup>44</sup>

But this argument is both heavily flawed and unnecessarily pious. Parekh's argument is suffused with a sermonising condescension that is unerringly communitarian. The religiosity of his conviction is delivered with every emphasis on the 'moral' dimensions of community and the repeated invocations of 'compassion' and 'concern'. His insistence that positive duties are engaged out of a sense of 'justice and not charity' is laboured and doesn't quite ring true.

It would be churlish to deny that private motivations for altruism arise from our inner sense of moral righteousness, that we have an intuitive duty to alleviate the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.p.11

suffering of others, or that a globalisation of compassion hasn't taken place (with obvious benefits for international charity).

But as the basis of secular institutions (to facilitate intercultural dialogue), public ethics (global citizenship) and an international mandate for justice, it requires us to bracket too many existing inequalities to have a transformative impact. By bracketing inequalities it also defers politics for equality for an unspecified later date. Acting on morally derived positive duties in the current global arena would entrench dependency, not nurture interdependence. Although his aspiration is outwardly for a 'global' citizenship, the traffic of compassionate positive duties flows conspicuously from the first to the third world, 'historically derived' obligations that citizens of developed nations have to bear.<sup>45</sup> What resources are the disadvantaged expected to mobilise to reciprocate this 'justice'? Charitable acts are predicated on inequalities, parasitic on suffering and transmit along causeways of reliance. As the pioneer of 'responsible' solidarity with the oppressed, Paolo Friere (1968) warned that pedagogy which 'makes of the oppressed (...) the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression'.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps unwittingly, Parekh's burden falls on the enfranchised and empowered to ameliorate the suffering of the disempowered. Parekh's community of responsibilities is a community of charity, not equality.

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<sup>45</sup> The exploitation of colonial labour and plunder of resources, the imposition of arbitrarily drawn territorial and political boundaries and the fomentation of sectarianism has left 'many Western states' 'partly responsible' for the conditions of life in other parts of the world. 'Western powers therefore, have an additional historically derived obligation to help these countries enjoy stable and decent lives.' Ibid., p.10.

<sup>46</sup> Paolo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1968)p.39.



Though his sentiments are indisputably well founded and the plea for responsiveness to the plight of others is commendable, sentiments are inadequate to address the systematic production of subalternity and can only applaud acts of liberal interventionism. Such sentiments cannot even imagine what it takes to collectively sustain the 'paradox' of re-inscribing responsibility as right.<sup>47</sup> This can only be done, in the spirit of Friere, by transforming victims into agents. It has to be done by refiguring the calculus of global exchange, by a sustained commitment to the material and discursive articulation of the dispossessed subject in both metropolitan and rural environments.<sup>48</sup>

Gayatri Spivak's (1999) conclusions from the history of colonialism echo this critique. She finds that the restitution of rights and rightful property hasn't brought the coloniser and the colonised onto a level playing field, but only germinated a culture of debt, dependency and obligation: 'what was first perceived as a right came to be accepted as obligation – as being obliged'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sangeeta Ray, 'Ethical Encounters: Spivak, Alexander and Kincaid', *Cultural Studies*, 17:1 (2003) p.44.

<sup>48</sup> Parekh's preference for 'internationalism' above cosmopolitanism, is out of step with Timothy Brennan's 'Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism' (2001). Parekh believes that internationalism which he believes can transcend the 'pathologies of nationalism and cosmopolitanism' while retaining their basic moral impulses. (p.12.) Brennan reads internationalism as the dialectical Other of cosmopolitanism and popular uprisings to establish sovereignty in national arenas of oppression should be supported. He dismisses cosmopolitanism as a derivative of the comfortable culture of middle class travellers, intellectuals and businessmen, whereas internationalism is an ideology of the domestically restricted, the recently relocated, the provisionally exiled and the temporarily weak. It addresses those who have 'an interest in transnational forms of solidarity, but whose capacities for doing so have not yet arrived'. Parekh slurs cosmopolitanism because it is inattentive to special ties and attachment, favouring instead the dilettante pursuit of the 'abstract ideal of universal well-being.' He interprets internationalism to stand otherwise as the acceptance of love for community, but expands this to include respect and concern for other communities and so stresses our global duties' See Timothy Brennan, 'Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism' *New Left Review*, 7 (2001).

<sup>49</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 214.

What Parekh's analysis produces is a notion of politicised responsibility bereft of a politicised understanding of responsibility *itself*. This is because his imagination of responsibility is politically innocent (using political in the sense of the complex of social relations), failing to bring emergent cultures of rights and entrenched cultures of power into historical confrontation.

His apolitical community of responsibility as a 'conscience collective' is devoid of the memory of struggles for human rights but heavily invested in the operations of the politics *of* human rights, a distinction made earlier to signify the disjuncture between the actors and the authors of human rights. Its innocence requires us to enter into a state of critical disbelief where it is possible for responsibility to be globally enacted instead of being corralled by a privileged elite. It gives succour to the messianic imperialism that Robert Cooper (2002) and his like-minded friends are trying to propagate, a *pax Britannica* ethically justified by a counterfeited sense of obligation.<sup>50</sup>

A way to bring responsibility into history and into politics is to reconceive it as a right in itself – a positive right to shape futures, to right wrongs and to act against oppression. Not just a right in itself then, but a means to other ends with which to build a more just society and world. Universal human responsibilities logically impel universal human rights. Rehabilitating responsibility to make it more

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<sup>50</sup> Cooper is a senior British diplomat and an advisor to the foreign office. His article 'Why We Still Need Empires' advocates interventions by the 'post-modern world' in the 'pre-modern world', 'a world of failed states'. He argues that the threats posed by the pre-modern world to the postmodern world justify pre-emption by any means: 'The postmodern world has to start to get used to double standards. Among ourselves, we operate on the basis of laws and open cooperative security. But, when dealing with old-fashioned states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era - force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the nineteenth century world of every state for itself.'. His vision is of a 'co-operative empire'. Robert Cooper, 'Why We Still Need Empires', *Observer*, 7 April: 2002, pp.1-12.

amenable to a culture of human rights than 'obligation' and 'duty' currently manages can only be achieved by a more political and a less humanitarian engagement with its concept.

The rationalization of responsibility as obligation cannot be disengaged from the operations of class apartheid in the human rights regime. For Spivak (1999 & 2003), the historical deprivation of rights is an incoherent narrative without a supplementary engagement with the deprivation of *responsibility*. These two are historically twinned because responsibility is itself a (positive) right whose absence is also constitutive of poverty. This reclamation of responsibility asks questions of the righteousness of humanitarian interventions as they proliferate through the machineries of justice and international government.

Anyone with a passing knowledge of Paolo Friere's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1967) will recognise Spivak's wholesale transposition of his critique to the human rights regime in 'Righting Wrongs'. This is obvious from the analogies between Spivak's designation of the agents and the disenfranchised in human rights labour and Friere's distinction between 'responsible Subjects' and 'uncritical objects', between Spivak's urge to upgrade subaltern pedagogies and Friere's advocacy of critical consciousness among the oppressed, and finally in their mutual incitement for the systematic transformation of the former condition by the actions of dialogic education.

Though both are ostensibly written within an imperial *milieu*, Spivak's appropriation of Friere's argument produces certain tensions, principally because while the latter is urging for radicalised leadership among the oppressed, the weight

of the former's injunctions fall heaviest on those who would claim to work with the subaltern on the privileged side of the power divide. This will be discussed later.

In *Imperatives to Re-Imagine the Planet* (1999) and 'Righting Wrongs' (2003), Spivak looks to overturn dominant constructions of responsibility. In these texts she seeks to impress the desire to derogate from the inherited Enlightenment imperative of a responsibility *for*, and to substitute it with an alternative responsibility *to*. The ethical weight of the latter does not fall on a charitable obligation for the Other, but on the opportunity for the Other to emerge as an equal stakeholder in planetary concerns.

Spivak contends that responsibility as obligation turns on the hegemony of the 'North-Western' voice in the international division of labour. In this scene, the role of the human rights intervener - he/she empowered to 'right wrongs' - is assigned to an elite transnational corps who position themselves as human rights' missionary ambassadors. This grand civilizing venture sustains its mandate through the apartheid of class-enabled mobility.

Through such executive processes human rights are denuded of their insurrectionary potential and re-inscribed as Northern bounty. Spivak maintains that human rights interventions transmit along the class lines of global capital, where an investment in the production of subalternity goes hand in hand with the ostensible desire for its amelioration.

In short, the practice of 'righting wrongs' denies social justice at the same time as it denounces the suppression of rights. The ethical imperative to right wrongs is also



greater where strategic and financial initiatives are stronger. The cold calculus of political intervention compromises the beneficence of the human rights project:

Human rights is not just about having or claiming a right or set of rights, it is also about righting wrongs, about being the dispenser of these rights. The idea of human rights, in other words, may carry within itself the agenda of a kind of social Darwinism: the fittest must shoulder the burden of righting the wrongs of the unfit – and the possibility of an alibi'.<sup>51</sup>

The dispensation of human rights refracts the asymmetric exchange between the global North and South. Its (dys) function approximates to the unequal dialogue between the metropolitan postcolonial academy and the subaltern. In that scene, the ventriloquisms of subaltern speech, through its forced adoption of male bourgeois subjectivity (Martha Nussbaum's 'fully human voice') censor authentic voices, suppresses genuinely political multiculturalism and aggrandizes the Euro-American episteme. It is the wilful foreclosure of the native subject – as central to the production of Reason as to the expansion of imperialism – that led Spivak to pronounce in 1988 that the 'subaltern cannot speak'.

Her critique of human rights turns on the exposure of an analogous dynamic at the level of political intervention and capitalist alibi. Identical to the epistemological benevolence of nationalist/postcolonial historiography, the class apartheid of agency in the 'righting wrongs' project consigns the victims of human rights abuses to the

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<sup>51</sup>Spivak, *RW*, p.169.



role of perpetually passive and grateful recipients of charitable justice. Until the subaltern is engaged in constructive dialogue with the west – enabled by the democratising aspects of ‘literary pedagogy’ – Spivak argues that the project of global justice will not be unmoored from its elite anchors.

Spivak considers the animating desires underwriting humanitarian intervention as troubling, but not ethically insurmountable, since, like the ‘enabling violation’ of the production of the colonial subject, it cannot be written off, its enablement embraced, even as ‘the violation is renegotiated’.<sup>52</sup> The democratisation of the righting of wrongs only demands that the ethics of responsibility driving such intervention be denaturalised.

The interpretation of responsibility she refers to is that as obligation. This is both incommunicable with socialism and invested in the shoring up of Enlightenment reason as the singular Culture. Willed into action by the sense of the obliged, the Northern planetary subject flexes the moral muscularity of the white man’s burden. It is the weight of this inherited burden that compels the reproduction of class asymmetry as the duties of the fittest: ‘social Darwinism’ in its most splendid avatar.<sup>53</sup> Spivak is astute enough, however, not to allow this analysis to drift towards a facile Third Worldism. Those charged with the task of righting wrongs (the kind of labour that the powerful arrogate to themselves) are not uniformly western in provenance, but dispersed throughout the nation state system as the highly mobile transnational middle classes. She writes that these are the actors and agents of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.190.

human rights activities; the mobile locus of judiciary power, in command of its discourse and possession of its instruments.

Spivak believes that the transnational human rights corps is inadequate to democratise the urgent labour of righting wrongs by itself because it is largely ignorant and alienated from the oppressed. Human rights agents represent Arif Dirlik's (1997) enclaves of 'first worlds in third worlds', globalisation's nascent demographic who suffer from an inverted subalternity where privilege is figured as loss.<sup>54</sup>

We cannot necessarily expect the old colonial subject transformed into the new domestic middle-class urban radical (...) to engage in the attempt I shall go on to describe. Although physically based in the south and therefore presumably far from the utopian university, this class is generally also out of touch with the mindset – a combination of epistemic and ethical discourse – of the rural poor below the NGO level.<sup>55</sup>

Those positioned as agents without epistemic lines of mobility to the subaltern perpetuate the dispossession and disarticulation of the rural poor. It is cultural

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<sup>54</sup> Dina Al -Kassim, 'The Face of Foreclosure', *Interventions*, 4:2 (2002) p.173. The crime here is not Eurocentrism, for, by and large, as Spivak herself puts forward as a notable caveat, as descendants of the colonial subject, domestic human rights workers are culturally positioned against Eurocentrism. Her comment that the diasporic in the metropolis stands for 'diversity against Eurocentrism' is a naïve exegesis of migrant politics, which can display as little tolerance for new forms of diversity as host societies.

<sup>55</sup> Spivak, *RW*. p.173. The distance between the metropolitan south and the 'utopian university' may not be as great as Spivak assumes, particularly given the efforts made to recruit South and East Asian students, patently for the financial benefits of international fees.

illiteracy on both sides of both sides of the international class apartheid that sustains the invisibility of the subaltern as the bearer of human rights and consolidates the metropolitan as the subject of public virtue. Given that the engines of human rights cultures are Northern in ideological origin (even when it comes from the metropolitan South) there is a real epistemic discontinuity between Southern human rights advocates and those whom they protect.<sup>56</sup>

She suggests that the self-appointed guardians of human rights standards (like 'Macaulay's Minute Men') inherit the moral imperatives of obligation from Northern ideological pressure.<sup>57</sup> The dispensation of human rights proceeds from the motives of the 'burden of the fittest'. This inscription of responsibility as obligation, as duty, depoliticises and mystifies its embodiment of class agency and power. It mires responsible action in morality and renders invisible the class ceilings that separate the agent and the object.

Spivak makes a corresponding argument that subaltern cultures suffer comparatively from an impoverishment of democratic skills. She describes them as stagnant, de-legitimised and corrupted by their inadequacy for capitalist survival. Their dislocation on the other side of the global scene of class division is compounded by a severe pedagogical poverty, while critical intelligence is monopolised by metropolitan education. Subaltern pedagogies – with particular reference to the rural poor – are fixated at the stagnant level of rote learning and memorization.<sup>58</sup> As Friere does, Spivak recognises the role that traditional education

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.174.

<sup>57</sup> Jill Didur and Teresa Heffernan, 'Revisiting the Subaltern in the New Empire', *Cultural Studies* 17: 1 (2003) p.7.

<sup>58</sup> Spivak, *RW*, p.209.

plays in the dehumanisation of the oppressed, reproducing and reinforcing class structures. As a function of the capitalist system, Freire believed formal education played its part by keeping the disadvantaged uncritical and unquestioning, thereby suppressing revolutionary thoughts. Spivak says that we must advance pedagogy capable of binding 'democratic reflexes' onto subaltern epistemes in order to bring the subaltern to the subjectivity of rights:

'The culture of responsibility is corrupted. The effort is to learn it with patience from below and to keep trying to suture it to the imagined felicitous subject of universal human rights. Second, the education system is a corrupt ruin of the colonial model. The effort is to persistently undo it, to teach the habit of democratic civility. Third, to teach the habits/with responsibility to the corrupted culture is different from children's indoctrination into nationalism, resistance-talk, and identitarianism.<sup>59</sup>

Activating the dormant structures of subaltern societies amounts to a preliminary enfranchisement of equal participation on the human rights stage. Since their democratisation is a function of education, this has to be principle strategy in bringing the subaltern to human rights subjectivity and securing the longevity of democratic futures.

Exactly what she means by the phrase 'democratic civility' is troubling, not least because it is proposed as an alternative to a corrupted colonial legacy but still reeks

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.226.

of civilisational condescension (and besides, it appears to be a redundant truism: aren't all forms of 'civility' democratic?) Most perceptively though, Spivak submits that a 'responsible' engagement with subaltern alterity should not lapse into the inculcation of sectarian prejudice. The doctored history schoolbooks of Gujarat, with their glowing admiration of Hitlerism and factual distortions of the Muslim presence in India, are a disturbing testament to the abusive appropriation of education for communal ends. Without the cultivation of democratic intelligence throughout the terrain of uneven development, the subject of collective responsibility will never emerge from the ruins of subaltern society:

As long as real equalisation through recovering and training the long-ignored ethical imagination of the rural poor and indeed, all species of sub-proletarians on their own terms – is not part of the agenda to come, s/he has no chance of becoming the subject of Human Rights as part of a collectivity, but must remain, forever its object of benevolence.<sup>60</sup>

Spivak wants to rehabilitate responsibility by articulating them through dormant ethical imperatives such as the Islamic notion of *haq* and non-rationalized tropes such as the planet (using planetarization to overwrite globalisation<sup>61</sup>). These are concepts and concept metaphors which have been de-legitimised through their exclusion from the hegemon of modern capitalism, for which 'they are

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.207.

<sup>61</sup> 'I am writing, rather, for a position that has this particular non-relationship to the global, as I explain below: a position whose defining other is the outer as such: dis-locating a position that only seeks to control by digital quantification'. Ibid, p.44.



inadequate'.<sup>62</sup> She argues that it is only by unlearning the basis of derivation and the logical and ethical priority of rights that the inscription of responsibility as right can begin to be comprehended.

But Spivak's illumination of subordinated cultures of responsibility is troublesomely opaque. The most detailed excursion into their cultural logic is in 'Righting Wrongs', where she explains:

Subaltern cultures of responsibility, then, base the agency of responsibility in that outside of the self that is also in the self, half-archived and therefore not directly accessible.<sup>63</sup>

Typically elliptical, she offers only analogies to its meaning (these include our creative use of language, which is both interiorized yet exterior in the sense of our incomplete knowledge of it). Responsibility based cultures are those with a recognition that the other calls us 'before will.' They persistently realise, through their lived subjectivity, the 'parts of the mind not accessible to reason', those which are 'inaccessible to us as objects and instruments':<sup>64</sup>

'The responsibility I speak of, then, is not necessarily the one that comes from the consciousness of superiority lodged in the self (...) but one that is, to begin with, sensed before sense as a call to the Other (...) we might grasp the assumption that the human being is human in

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.190.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>64</sup> Didur & Heffernan, p.8.

answer to an 'outside call'. We can grasp the structure of the role of alterity at work in subordinated cultures according to these analogies. The word 'before' in 'before the will' is here used to mean logical and chronological priority as well in front of '.<sup>65</sup>

Because these subordinate cultures of responsibility have been neglected from the 'dominant loom' (capitalism) they have been a foreclosed presence in the constitutional proliferation of rights. They have proved 'defective for capitalism' as the articulations of a planetary consciousness have been relegated below ideologies of individuation and the bourgeois subject. She proposes that, in their current decrepitude, they can only be rehabilitated by suturing their reactivated cultural axiomatic into the principles of the Enlightenment'.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, the very imperative to open out to other epistemologies is supposed to be inspired by the logic of the planetary. The act of suturing pre-capitalist responsibility cultures with the rationality of the Enlightenment episteme is such an engagement with their ethics of alterity since 'educating "into" the planetary imperative entails assuming and thus effacing an absolute and discontinuous alterity thus comfortable with an inexhaustible diversity of epistemes'.<sup>67</sup> Undertaking the labour of intercultural dialogue is an instance in itself of an ethical engagement with alterity.

Spivak desires to orchestrate these pedagogic efforts through the humanities. On the one hand, metropolitan pedagogies are predicated on the reproduction of a

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<sup>65</sup> Spivak, RW, p.200.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.190.

<sup>67</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak & Willi Goetschel, *Imperatives to Re-imagine the Planet/Imperative Zur Neuerfindung Des Planeten* (Vienna: Passagen, 1999), p.74.

hegemonic mindset and episteme, which we have already established as a vital element in the aggrandizement of the Northern elite as the subject of public virtue or the destined 'righter of wrongs'. Impelled only by Reason and not the Other, it vitiates the paternalistic charity of a responsibility *for* in the absence of a responsibility *to*. It reinforces the asymmetry of human rights discourse by the class apartheid of those well placed to right wrongs and those perennially deprived of the right to enact collective responsibility.

This has gone on under the license of a moral confidence based in the certainty of the subject and the naturalised conviction of righteousness. It is this moral confidence that has not only legitimated the ventriloquisms of the disarticulated subject but also invested the dispensation of rights with such fervent faith. What can correct the asymmetrical position of the elite to the subaltern is an alternative ethic of responsibility which does not promote thinking for or acting on behalf of, but the 'critical intimacy' gained only through 'speaking to the heterogeneous subaltern'.<sup>68</sup>

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) this appears as a 'habit of reading' predicated on the voluntary suspension of certainty. She writes that the first condition and effect of this literary training is to suspend the conviction that 'I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs'.<sup>69</sup>

Spivak is addressing the metropolitan postcolonial elites, the 'model diasporics' who are presented with two avenues of opportunity, two ideological pathways: either to submit themselves to the blithe self-confidence of international civil society, or to

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<sup>68</sup> Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak', in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (ed) Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988) p241.

<sup>69</sup> Spivak, *RW*, p.181.

‘join the globe girdling Social Movements in the South through the entry point of their own countries of origin’.<sup>70</sup> With a patent aggrandisement of her own occupational interests, Spivak calls for a ‘red thread of a humanities to come’, attempting an ‘uncoercive rearrangement of desires’ from which a preference for the latter can be habituated.

Spivak anthropomorphises these two ideological literacies into the figures of the elite postcolonial and the new immigrant who are both avatars of the present-day metropolitan migrant. S/he is urged to read against ‘multiculturalism, development and UN style universalism’ to expose them as code words for the hegemonisation of the global financier class. Emphasising our complicity ‘in order to act’ brings us as close to a foundation as Spivak will allow. She believes, writing in the preface, that training in a literary habit of reading the world can ‘put a curb on superpower triumphalism, only if it does not perceive acknowledgement of complicity as an inconvenience’.<sup>71</sup>

Thomas Keenan (2000) expands on the alternative responsibility Spivak invests the political act with:

The responsibility she demands is not a simple one. It is not the solidity of self-presence, of the I-know-where I stand, of the accomplishment of the I, of the self-confidence subject taking pride in the foundations of moral certainty. Indeed, that is just the target here: moral confidence, the ethical translation of self-certainty, who-I-am-without division and

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<sup>70</sup> Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p.407.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, xii.

hence at a distance from political difficulty (...) In her hands, on the other hand, responsibility is re-worked, re-thought, re-practised, as something other: the acknowledgement of and response to complicity, implication, an acknowledgement that by definition can never be complete.<sup>72</sup>

To 'resign from a position of certitude' is to open up that intellectual space from where the Other can enter discourse with parity. She argues that until we decentre our discursive subjectivity, (to 'shift agency a bit') we will never be able to reinscribe responsibility as right. Acknowledging our arrogation of subjective activity and becoming uneasy with our complicities prefigures both an ethical relation with the Other ('humanities to come') and the redistribution of global power/agency (social justice).<sup>73</sup>

The patient act of 'learning to learn from below' closely resembles the virtues of intercultural dialogue that Parekh identifies as constituent of the multicultural perspective. In the dialogically constituted society, neither minority nor majority can 'escape the scrutiny of the other', and by inhabiting the resultant space of 'immanent transcendentalism' we can gain the vantage from which to critically approach our own perspectives.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Keenan, 'The Push and Pull of Rights and Responsibilities', *Interventions* 7: 1 (2002) pp.192-3.

<sup>73</sup> While I engage with her reflections on the possibility of meaningful encounters with the Other, I do not delve into the philosophical dimensions of ethics as such. It is true that Spivak's deconstructive proclivity means that she approaches question of rights and responsibilities from the ethics of alterity and this exercises exclusive influence on her discussion of rights and responsibility.

<sup>74</sup> Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, p.347.



There is an important convergence in Spivak's argument between responsibility as right and the agenda of political education. Unlike dominant constructions of political education, which focus on the raising of awareness among the racialised or oppressed, Spivak idiosyncratically goes against the grain to insist on reformatations in the education of the privileged or the enfranchised.

It is through education that Spivak envisions a role for the humanities to attempt an 'uncoercive rearrangement of desires' so that the instinct for dialogue trumps the instinct to intervene. The responsibility to 'ethically engage with alterity' is predicated on the cultivation of a sense of humility, something Upendra Baxi (1995) identifies as crucial to the enterprise of dialogic human rights education, where 'all nations come, more or less, equal strangers, whereas all people of the world come as cognoscenti who have experienced repression or struggle, and knowledge which such experience brings concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms'.<sup>75</sup> Spivak's own injunction for the northern subject to 'resign from a position of certitude' is a prophylaxis for the educative project of 'learning to learn from below'.<sup>76</sup>

This is also what Parekh (2003) raises in his attempt to negotiate the pitfalls of bourgeois cosmopolitanism and plebeian nationalism. Both, he insists, are hazardous ideologies premised on the fear of the Other, where diversity is collapsed into stereotypes. While the former dulls difference to confection, the latter sharpens then petrifies differences until they take on exclusive, even antagonistic personalities, leaving nothing behind but a shallow relativism:

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<sup>75</sup> Upendra Baxi, 'Human Rights Education: The Promise of the Third Millennium?', available at: <http://www.phre.org>. Accessed: 12 February 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Spivak, RW, p.226.

Both alike are sustained by the fear of the Other, and ill equipped to sustain the spirit of globally orientated citizenship in a multicultural world. What we need instead is openness to the other, an appreciation of the immense range and variety of human existence, an imaginative grasp of what both distinguishes and unites human beings, and the willingness to enter into a non-hegemonic dialogue.<sup>77</sup>

Parekh's globally orientated citizenship, like Spivak's transnational literacy, calls forth unheralded configurations of moral and political virtues, which have received limited attentions in discussions about citizenship. In common with transnational literacy, it demands that while we must act on 'active sympathy' for human suffering, this cannot be inspired by goodwill alone but demands that we 'cherish them [the suffering] as self-determining subjects with ideas of their own about how they wish to live, and to see the world the way they do'.<sup>78</sup>

Both are premised on an engagement with human and epistemic alterity irreconcilable with moral superiority. This non-hegemonic dialogue is the axiomatic principle of both transnational literacy (socialism as pedagogy) and globally orientated citizenship (internationalised multiculturalism). The importance of 'thinking other cultural angles' is ethically central to both.

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<sup>77</sup> Parekh, 'Cosmopolitanism', p.16.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. There is also no point downplaying their differences. Both antagonise the other. While Spivak occasionally disparages liberal multiculturalism as the handmaiden of neo-imperialism (particularly in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*), Parekh shrugs off the merits of contemporary feminism, or 'even its current western form.' 'Cosmopolitanism' p.16.

What is underdeveloped in their multicultural pedagogies, with their emphasis on the democratisation of metropolitan attitudes to cultural difference, is the endowment of a heretical, insurrectionary consciousness among the *oppressed*. It is neglected entirely in Parekh's case for global citizenship, and only fitfully addressed in Spivak's transnational literacy. Though Spivak identifies the poverties of subaltern education perceptively enough, her proposals for its enhancement are prefatory and politically toothless.

Spivak's articulation of political education is clearer on what it should not be than what it should. It should not be rote learning, incantation drills, spelling and memorization. It should not be a coercive system of education but a dialogic encounter between the student and text.<sup>79</sup> Because the teachers of the subaltern have been 'maimed' by the educational regimes that she is 'trying to combat', they have become estranged from the idea of non-coercive education.<sup>80</sup>

Her role for humanities education as an 'education without guarantees' which would culturally suture 'democratising reflexes' onto subaltern epistemes is intended as a universal project able to transcend the class apartheid that segregates the metropolitan and the subaltern. Both ends of the human rights spectrum - the powerful and the powerless - are expected to benefit from the same strategy.

This is where Spivak's non-coercive education falls short of Paulo Friere's concept of political education. Though Friere is as concerned as Spivak (and Parekh) in discursive equality and dignity, his overriding focus is the fostering of critical, political and revolutionary consciousness in the oppressed. The aspiration is not

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<sup>79</sup> Spivak, *RW*, pp.209-19.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.218-9.

only for the oppressed to be endowed with 'the power to resist colonization of the mind', but also for them to reach the 'conviction [of their freedom] as Subjects, not objects'. 'They must intervene critically in the situation which surrounds them and whose mark they bear'.<sup>81</sup> This demands knowledge by the oppressed of the condition of their oppression, the development of a critical understanding of their experience and position in society, social structures and processes of social change. It therefore also demands political literacy, a knowledge and understanding of human rights together with the skills to effect change. It's not entirely clear how Spivak's dialogic education encourages critical, self-determined interventions against oppressive regimes.

There is also, as will have been obvious from Spivak's telegraphic references to subaltern cultures of responsibility, a mythic character to them, since we are given no concrete examples of their existence. This compounds a troublesome essentialism to Spivak's insistence on the general quality of ethical responses to alterity and responsibility. Her occasional qualification that she 'can be no more than telegraphic here', that 'although it is my conviction', 'I cannot demonstrate it now', or that 'I need not be more specific here'<sup>82</sup> does nothing to assuage the reader's concern that her invocation of these pre-capitalist subaltern cultures' is anything but 'a 'responsible and minimal identitarianism'.<sup>83</sup> The use of high European theory to illuminate this ethic of alterity (in another essay) further clouds their authenticity.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Friere, p.54.

<sup>82</sup> Spivak, *RW*, p.201.

<sup>83</sup> Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p.156n.

<sup>84</sup> See Ray, p.46.

Though Spivak's materialist indictment of the elitism at the heart of the human rights regime is enabling, her programmatic call for it to be remedied via humanities pedagogy is idiosyncratically misleading. While she disclaims that humanities training is not a quick fix that should be undertaken by all those charged with the impatient task of righting wrongs, she still writes under the conviction that literary training can 'curb superpower triumphalism.' This amounts to more than the 'exorbitation of the intellectual's role'.<sup>85</sup> It admits to Meera Nanda's accusation that postcolonial studies, 'fundamentally, is an epistemological project'.<sup>86</sup> In her writings on agency, Spivak does not talk about actual people, but, as Neil Lazarus (1999) observes, 'discursive figures'.<sup>87</sup>

Contrary to Lazarus though, I do not find her entreaties for intellectual circumspection and circumscription to be symptomatic of Spivak's disregard for intellectual work, but consistent with Benita Parry's (2004) reading of its 'exorbitation'. As I read it, such is the gravity Spivak invests in intellectual labour, that it demands real conscientiousness from those who wield its power. As much as Spivak may hold it in contempt, Churchill's caution that 'the price of greatness is responsibility' aptly describes her estimation of the academic's magnitude. The implication of Spivak's investment in the critical act is that 'revelation of genealogies of power', are 'in some way, capable of disrupting new forms of western economic, political or technological terror or domination'.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004) p.20.

<sup>86</sup> Meera Nanda, *Breaking the Spell of Dharma: The Case for an Indian Enlightenment* (New Delhi: ThreeEssaysPress) p.135.

<sup>87</sup> Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Third World* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999)p.113.

<sup>88</sup> Chetan Bhatt, *Liberation and Purity: Race, new religious movements and the ethics of postmodernism* (London: UCL Press: 1993) p.6.



This is compounded by the messianic status afforded to the metropolitan migrant in her writings. It is she who has privileged access to the subaltern, by virtue of a 'training in literary method' and 'through the entry point of his or her own countries of origin'.<sup>89</sup> Even favourable critics have conceded that *A Critique* is 'Capital' for 'implied readers in middle management, corporate or academic.'<sup>90</sup>

It is the metropolitan migrant or the new immigrant who is the privileged agent of 'transnational literacy'. Their ability 'to learn one of the subaltern languages' enables a metonymic identification between the (female) diasporic humanities teacher and the subaltern. Spivak reproduces postcolonial studies' broader claim that, despite its disciplinary and institutional investments, its practitioners enjoy genuine, intimate and above all ethical familiarity with the subaltern and its struggles. Chetan Bhatt (1993) observes that this 'is a political claim about the knowledges that postcolonial theory produces about its subjects'.<sup>91</sup> Spivak restricts the franchise of this ethic relation further still to 'the talented tenth' of metropolitan migrants. The ambition of breeding an elite troop of migrant academics in command of exclusive epistemological affinities with the subaltern is dubious enough, without it being articulated in the midst of her assault on the transnational corps of activists that she identifies in the human rights regime.

It could even be argued that by insisting on the weightiness of postcolonial intellectual labour, realisable only by those capable of simultaneously articulating the dominant ethics of rights and the subordinate ethics of responsibility, Spivak introduces a backdoor dependency. In her imaginary, the responsible actions of the

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<sup>89</sup> Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p.407.

<sup>90</sup> Mark Sanders, 'Representation: reading Other-wise', *Interventions* 4 (2), (2002) p.203.

<sup>91</sup> Bhatt, p.22.

metropolitan migrant/diasporic humanities teacher can intervene in the suffering of the oppressed through the ethical enactment of critique and pedagogy.

This is not intended as a disownment of the responsibility of academic and intellectuals to engage ethically with their objects of study or to downplay the role of disciplinary pedagogy in influencing climates of opinion. It is intended instead to highlight the limitations of Spivak's political programme, limitations that she herself occasionally appears blind to.

But the most glaring limitation of Spivak's programme, as I have gestured towards earlier, is her failure to clearly expand on the fertilisation of political consciousness among the oppressed through 'non-coercive' pedagogies. Her pedagogy is geared, as Paolo Friere's political education is, toward dialogic encounters between the teacher and taught in order to 'name the world'.<sup>92</sup> I think the act of 'naming' the world, so integral to Friere's aspirations for the oppressed, is an under-developed aspect of Spivak's programme, even if it is clearly implied by her strategies.

Arguably the best exponent of 'naming the world', especially in its application to racial justice (to which Friere was inattentive), was Steve Biko through his philosophy of Black Consciousness. Like Friere's indictment of the middle class' abusive leadership of the working class in Brazil, Biko was frustrated by the involvement of liberals in blacks struggles, which he felt had arrested their progress. The black inferiority complex was drummed in by coercive education and everyday existence under apartheid and had led to uncritical acceptance of the world 'named' by white liberals acting in supposed solidarity. The assumption of a 'monopoly on

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<sup>92</sup> Friere, p.76.

intelligence and moral judgement' by the 'self-appointed trustees of black interest' had patterned liberal sensibilities onto the realisation of black aspirations for liberations.<sup>93</sup>

To allow black South Africans to accept authority for 'naming the world' demanded a programme of 'conscientisation', pedagogy for Africans to critically awaken to conditions of their subjugation:

We do make reference to the conditions of the black man and the conditions in which the black man lives. We try to get blacks in conscientisation to grapple realistically with their problems, to attempt to find solutions to their problems, to develop what one might call an awareness, a physical awareness of their situation, to be able to analyse it, and to provide answers for themselves.<sup>94</sup>

Until blacks could become the creators of their own symbolic world, to name the world, they could not critically intervene in the situation of their oppression. Black consciousness therefore sought to 'talk to the black man in a language that is his own', cultivating a kind of socio-political literacy.<sup>95</sup> Unlike Spivak, who largely ignores the vast opportunities for *informal* education and arenas for consciousness-raising outside those of classroom schooling, Biko (like Friere) saw conscientisation

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<sup>93</sup> Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002).p.66.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.,p.114.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.,p.32.

as a broader movement for new attitudes, approaches and actions for the transformation of black society.

I want to suggest that such political education is a vital grounding condition for the evolution of secular identities and consequently as a countervailing influence against cultural and religious sectarianism. Conscientisation firstly allows individuals - by naming the world - to culturally syncopate abstract principles of empowerment (such as human rights) to their lived conditions. This in turn opens up innovations and participatory spaces in political cultures with which to make self determined antiracist and antifascist interventions; in Spivak's words, the opportunity to enact collective responsibility as right.

Secondly it enables the socially marginal to recognise the ways in which they are constituted as *secular* minorities by local power, the state, and wider globalising forces. Because political education foregrounds the actuality of their oppression as lived existence, it emphasises their struggles for and their deprivation of secular services, resources and rights.

To this end it is vital to an evolution of secular political and cultural collective identities among the disadvantaged. Not only do they become politicised in secular ways in the collective endeavour against disadvantage, but these common political struggles activate emergent cultural identities. There is not a deracinating dynamic to this social process but a novel syncretism that militates against the essentialization of ethnic, religious and racial identities. The distinct cultural identities of minority alliances, new communities and identities in the making, testify to the integration of

the ethnic with the secular. Political education makes possible the communities of rights that Gewirth imagines.

Political education is therefore a useful countervailing strategy against the inclinations of state multiculturalism and religious communitarianism that tend to reify cultural difference into impermeable community formations, walling politically illiterate citizens inside and away from a participatory public sphere. By recognising their secular constructions, individuals are also prompted to act in politically secular ways, as citizen-actors. The two aspects of political education, secularising and enabling, mutually strengthen the other through this circular reciprocity.

Responsibility must be reclaimed from an apolitical moral vernacular where it is ethically conflicted with human rights. It should not be invoked as the antagonistic other of rights, but could, through rehabilitations such as that undertaken by Spivak, in the spirit of Freire and Biko, be conceived of as a right in itself, bringing it into history and politics as a confrontation between cultures of power and struggles for rights.

The right to enact collective responsibility turns on the democratisation of interventions in the public sphere, a democratisation presaged by the conscientisation of marginalized social actors and the formation of emergent secular identities. The relationship between these secular emergent identities and theories of cultural difference, constructions of community and the politics of citizenship in Britain and India will be my concern in the following chapters of this thesis.



## **Politicising Minority: Between the Postcolonial and the Secular**

- In the colonial society, community was where citizenship was not.

Aijaz Ahmad, *On Communalism and Globalisation* (2002)

- The jeering, hooting young men who battered down the Babri Masjid are the same ones whose pictures appeared in the papers in the days that followed the nuclear tests. They were on the streets, celebrating India's nuclear bomb and simultaneously "condemning Western Culture" by emptying crates of Coke and Pepsi into public drains. I'm a little baffled by their logic: Coke is Western Culture, but the nuclear bomb is an old Indian tradition? Arundhati Roy, 'The End of Imagination', *The Guardian* (1998)

The ascendancy of the postcolonial critique of modernity assigns it a powerful voice in debates around the legitimacy of state secularism in India. Since it has long since concerned itself with posing a political as well as an epistemological challenge to western power, postcolonial reason has led in the frontlines of a battle of ideological wills which has split India's contemporary Left.

The pertinence of the secularist debate for British antiracist praxis is its course along the same reticulate lines that have fissured its own Left. These are (but not restricted to) a negotiation of the influence of orthodox Marxism, the prevailing salience of the politics of recognition and the competing desires for equality and difference articulated by these respective Leftist strands.

The 'democratic bundle' promoted in the inception of the independent nation-state has riven progressive politics in postcolonial India. The shrivelling stature of Indian democracy, degeneratively corrupted from the Sino-India war of 1965 to Indira Gandhi's singular contribution to its obituary in the Emergency of 1977, pre-empted the co-option of large swathes of the disillusioned Left to the pontifications of Jayaprakash Narayan's movement for land restitution, sacrificing organised political resistance on the dying embers of Gandhism. Meera Nanda (2002) identifies this moment, coterminous with that universalisation of belligerent neo-liberalism across the political spectrum, with the collapse of a secularist opposition to cultural nationalism in India.

Postcolonial studies, she writes, aided and abetted the meteoric coming to hegemony of cultural nationalism and the cultivation of the religious vote bank. Its contribution to the crisis of secularism has occurred by way of its conception of minority politics in overwhelmingly epistemic terms – mandated by its institutional co-ordinates in English and cultural studies departments. Its imperative for the 'power-knowledge of the West to be deconstructed and the colonized allowed –

again - to see reality through “their own” conceptual frameworks’ has been appropriated by the resurgent organs of Hindutva.<sup>1</sup>

It is, she insists, not by way of deliberately communal agenda but an inadvertent yet fateful surrender to cultural community which has seen India’s Left stand down in the face of the Right’s assault on the secular character of Indian nationalism. Instead of seeking to transform the margin, it became its stoical guardians; circumspect and scornful of the missionary zeal of Western constitutionalism.

The following chapter looks at how the Left has theorised the overthrow of Hindutva’s ‘ideological counter revolution’ and why this has stumbled. It looks at the factors underpinning the crisis of secularism including the factionalism of rights and responsibility based politics by contrasting texts from Ashis Nandy, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Aijaz Ahmad and Achin Vanaik to illustrate the divisions between anti-secularist and Marxist imaginaries. I argue that the mutual exclusions of each position are counter-intuitive to the social ownership of secularism, the emergence of citizen actors, and the enactment of collective responsibility as right.

As Achin Vanaik notes, anti-secularism is ‘not a serious political force guiding any identifiable party, or organisation of any major consequence. It is rather an intellectual current which has gained ground in Indian academia, among NGO activists, and has influenced the general public discourse on matters pertaining to communalism and secularism’.<sup>2</sup> It had gained ground and achieved public

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<sup>1</sup> Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003)p.158.

<sup>2</sup> Achin Vanaik, *Furies of Indian Communalism* (London: Verso, 1997).p.152.

resonance, as I have intimated earlier, with the wave of Gandhian nostalgia popularised and romanticised by the JP movement.<sup>3</sup>

The decrepitude of the Nehruvian consensus (secularism, socialism and scientific temper), coupled with the dwindling influence of organised labour, handed the political initiative to a political populism which was Gandhian in inspiration. It was neo-Gandhism in turn which vivified the anti-secularist agenda. Catalysed by the popularity of the JP movement, a complex of environmental groups, academic scholars and political groups took up the Gandhian mantle. Even the Janata Sangh, boasting ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, gained influence in the political Centre as part of the ramshackle coalition that briefly deposed Indira Gandhi with its self-styled political philosophy of 'Gandhian socialism'.<sup>4</sup>

The reconstitution of the Indian Left and the renaissance of the anti-secular agenda can therefore be explained, partially at least, by the ideological vacuum left by the implosion of Nehruvian socialism and the crisis of credibility suffered by Indian democracy. I shall now look at the substantive aspects of anti-secularist politics.

A basic anti-secularist premise is the refusal to accord Hindutva *religious* status. Chatterjee (1995) rejects the possibility that the Hindu Right can be fought on the site of the secular. He argues that Hindutva's strategies have not been characterised by demands for the elevation of religious institutions or dogma to public office and law, but more accurately by a desire to firm up the definition of a national culture

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<sup>3</sup> It is little coincidence that the BJP were thrown together in an uneasy alliance in the ramshackle coalition which briefly deposed Indira Gandhi in the 1977 elections, and that Jayaprakash Narayan endorsed Hindutva's electoral rise to power.

<sup>4</sup> A creed which survived long into the 1980s as that of the BJP's forerunner, the Janata Party.

able to homogenise citizenship<sup>5</sup>. It is only within the domain of the modern that it can mobilise ideological resources to 'promote intolerance and violence against minorities'.<sup>6</sup>

Nandy (above all others) forcefully makes the distinction between religion as ideology and religion as faith. According to Nandy Hindutva is categorically barren of religious faith, mobilising demagoguery and symbolism for blatant secular ends. The instrumental bastardisation of Hinduism manufactures a 'national ideology' stripped bare of its moral, cultural and religious content.<sup>7</sup>

He argues that the gentrified, modernised and culturally sanitised Hinduism sold to the nation is a selective and elitist abridgment of Hinduism's ungovernable diversity. He states that Hindutva 'defensively rejected or devalued the little cultures of India as so many indices of the country's backwardness', selectively sculpting a Brahmanic, Vedantic and classical Hinduism that could aspirationally commune India's lower classes with their urbane middle class countrymen without embarrassing the influential and wealthy diasporic communities. This 'high culture' of Hinduism was then processed, packaged and sold as the spirit of a globally competitive India. Nandy's perception of Hindutva is of a travesty of Hinduism, a religion refracted through the distorting lens of consumerism, massification and urban gigantism.

Nandy sees further evidence of this in the emptiness of the imagining of the Hindu *rashtra* (nation). It makes no reference to 'folk traditions' of governance and is

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<sup>5</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'Secularism and Tolerance', *Economic and Political Weekly* (1994) p.1768.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Shikha Trivedy Ashis Nandy, Shail Mayaram, Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).p.59.



‘culturally hollow’, ‘nothing more than the post-seventeenth century European concepts of nationality and nation-state projected back into the Indian past’.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Islamic theocracies that are governed in the spirit of Islam and by *sharia* law, the imagined Hindu *rashtra* bears little resemblance to the social, cultural or moral landscapes of pre-modern India; it is merely urbanisation, remote government and secularisation re-branded ‘Hindu’ to enthuse ‘urban, middle class’ and ‘expatriate Indians’.<sup>9</sup> It is in the modern context of Hindutva that the ‘westernised middle classes’ see their ‘secular interests as well as private hopes, anxieties and fears well reflected.’<sup>10</sup> India’s political culture is therefore no longer a contested field of modern or traditional values, but now:

a site of contestation between the modern that attacks or bypasses traditions and the modern that employs traditions instrumentally. This has opened up political possibilities for Hindu nationalism that were not open when the traditional idiom of Indian politics *was* the major actor in the culture of Indian politics and when a sizeable section of Indians were not insecure about their Hinduism. As we have said, Hindu nationalism has always been an illegitimate child of modern India, not of Hindu traditions. Such a nationalism is bound to feel more at home when the main struggle is between two forms of modernity and when the instrumental form of traditions - the use of religion as an

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

ideology rather than as a faith – is not taboo for a majority of the political class.<sup>11</sup>

Nandy claims that Hindutva parasitically harvests the insecure anxieties of Hindu identity. These anxieties, in turn, have sprung from the disorientating process of urbanisation, secularisation and development. He regards Hindutva's ideology and the instrumental deployment of religion for nationalist power as inevitable by-products of Indian modernity. This 'modern world-view' has not arrived at such widespread influence as colonial legacy alone, but also through a self-conscious amnesia on the part of modernised Indians of past Indians concepts of statecraft.<sup>12</sup>

Nandy contends that this modernising trajectory has sought to steamroll ethnicity under the wheels of modernisation. Ethnic groups are not brought to peaceful coexistence through political process but terminally resolved through state interventions. Ethnicity itself is perceived to imperil the integrity of a 'mainstream national culture' which is 'fearful of diversities' and 'panicky about any self-assertion or search for autonomy by ethnic groups'.

Ethnicity is therefore identified as threatening to the state and routinely subject to its 'coercive power'. There is no mediation between the community and the state; the state refusal to recognise the actual and legitimate presence of ethnic communities indicts secularism itself as 'a part of the disease'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.78.

<sup>12</sup> 'Hindu nationalism has always held in contempt the memories of Hindu polity as it survives in the traditional sectors of the Hindu society.' Ibid., p.62.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp.19-20.

Nandy grieves that the ruling elite's obsession with statism and nationalism has not only bypassed traditional channels of political mediation but systematically undermined their legitimacy; both ideologically and materially. In breach of these fraternal networks, the values of Nehruvian secularism have undermined the intuitive social cohesion of 'folk' life and everyday Hindu practice:

Inter community ties in societies like India have come to be increasingly mediated through distant, highly centralized, impersonal administrative and political structures, through new consumption patterns and priorities set up by the processes of development, and through reordered traditional gender relationships and ideologies which now conform more and more to the needs of a centralized market system and the needs of the masculinized modern state. These issues have remained mostly unexplored in existing research on violence in India.<sup>14</sup>

Nandy's lament for 'reordered traditional gender relationships' (read female emancipation) and the breakdown of 'traditional communities' (read caste mobility) flays his veneer of counter-cultural radicalism and reveals the beating heart of communitarianism in his writing.

In common with other work on the evils of development, Nandy professes a desire to rehabilitate older imaginings of the individual's relation to society - imaginings ordered predominantly in terms of responsibilities, not rights. Hence the obituaries

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.21.

for traditional community relations stand in for broader cultural values of obligation and duty, selfless sacrifice in the name of a transcendent greater good like the community, society or the universe – precisely the kind of reasoning used to acquire caste submission.

The chief actors Nandy identifies with state development are the ‘modern’ and ‘semi modern’ middle classes. Though there is a confused conflation in Nandy’s writings between the bourgeoisie and the middle classes, he generally distinguishes between the nexus of ‘Anglicised elites’ and urban middle classes who propagated modern liberalism during the independence movement and the recent explosion of a politicised middle class eager for status ‘disproportionate to its size and its need for an ideology of state that would legitimate that access’.<sup>15</sup> Though he struggles to separate one demographic formation from the other, he is more hostile to the older class since he considers the later entrants to be innocent victims reaping the whirlwind of westernisation. Their ideological support of Hindutva is excused on the grounds of the traumas of disorientation, displacement and marginalisation, attributable to the modernising missions of the Anglicised elites.

As the principal actors of radicalism and nationalism, Nandy reckons that the middle classes are favourable to any interpretation of communal violence that ‘even partially hides their complicity’. The middle classes, the Left and nationalism conterminously represent the canker of secularism in the anti-secularist imagination. The growth of one feeds the others, strengthening the definition of the ‘national

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p23.

mainstream culture' and marginalizing those minorities which might be perceived as impediments to India's evolution from backward to modern society.<sup>16</sup>

Nationalism is generally depicted as having an exclusively middle class appeal since they are the only demographic which is literate in the scientized concepts of secularism, history and nation state. It holds no currency for the Indian masses according to Nandy. Between Left and Hindu nationalism, the latter is considered to have greater allure for the modern middle classes, since they are the group who are most discomfited by the alienations of modern life and social relations and who require the palliative of a Hinduism compatible with their desires for upward mobility.

The citizens of the Hindu *rashtra* are likewise exclusively metropolitan Indians or those constantly exposed to what he terms the 'modern idiom of politics', those with 'one foot in western education and values', the other in simplified versions of classical thought now available in commodifiable forms in the urban centres of India'.<sup>17</sup> Hindutva offers a palatable and 'pasteurised Hinduism' to help make sense of the 'schizophrenia of dislocation' the 'reality of uprooting, deculturation and massification'.<sup>18</sup>

The only distinction Nandy permits between secular and Hindu nationalism is one of intellectual origins: while secularism legitimately derives from modernity, Hindu nationalism is modern India's 'illegitimate' child.<sup>19</sup> Hindutva exists as an embarrassment to state secularism, testifying to its inadequacies in politically

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid,p.63.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.77.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.20.



managing India's diversity. From an anti-secularist standpoint secularism can never be a viable inoculation against communal violence because it begets the very conditions under which society becomes communalised. The coercive bludgeoning of ethnic demands by state machinery in 'turn leads to deeper communal divides and to the perception of the state as essentially hostile to the interests of the aggrieved communities.'<sup>20</sup>

Nandy thus explains Hindutva as a distorted representation of the religiosity suppressed and censored by secularist dogma. Psychologically, Hindutva's secular derivations are interpreted to unveil the 'ideologues of religious violence' as representatives of the 'disowned self of South Asia's modernised middle classes'.<sup>21</sup>

It's on this basis that Nandy exonerates the agents of Hindutva from any deliberate wrongdoing in the *Ramjanmabhumi* agitation. He categorically affirms that 'in the story we have told' [of *Ramjanmabhumi*] 'there are no villains,' and 'even those who like villains in our story turn out to be messengers carrying messages they themselves cannot read'.<sup>22</sup> They cannot read these messages presumably because they themselves inhabit such 'invaded, fragmented and destabilised' territory that they are marginalized in the very place they stand. Hindutva's lumpen minions cannot be held accountable for their own alienation since criminalizing these unhappy, torn, comic-book crusaders for Hindutva as great conspirators and bloodthirsty chauvinists is to underwrite the self-congratulatory smugness of India's westernised middle class and deny its complicity in the *Ramjanmabhumi* stir'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, viii.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

So while Nandy refrains from assigning blame to the perpetrators of communal violence, he has less conscience in implicating those who he believes are culpable for their alienation. The proxy institutionalisation of the 'modern' idiom of politics by the West's 'brain children' has by and large been conducted against the intuitive will of the Indian people.

This conflict between secularism and democracy goes to the heart of Nandy's rhetoric and reason. By arguing that secularism is undemocratic Nandy is free to present 'critical traditionalism' as a kind of heroic, popular anti-fascism. He does this firstly by stressing how secularism has censored the public expression of religiosity, effectively disenfranchising 'average Indians' as political actors, and secondly by claiming that it is only 'democratisation itself [that] has put limits on the secularisation of Indian politics', as 'average Indians' have challenged the 'anglocratic' monopoly of the national imaginary.<sup>24</sup>

By rhetorically identifying secularism as an intellectual beachhead of missionary colonialism he is able to embed it within teleologies of progress. Bruce Robbins agrees: 'the word secular has a long history of serving as a figure for the authority of a putatively universal reason, or (narratively speaking), as the ideal end point of progress in the intellectual domain'.<sup>25</sup>

Nandy's critique is sympathetic to the tirades against secularism issued in the wake of the Rushdie *fatwa*. As Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wynne Davies declare in *Distorted Imagination* (1991), 'standing up to secularism has thus become a

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<sup>24</sup> Nandy, quoted in Radhika Desai, *Slouching Towards Ayodhya* (New Delhi: Three Essays Press, 2002) p.115.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Robbins, 'Secularism, Elitism, Progress and Other Transgressions', *Social Text* 40, Fall (1994) p.27.

matter of cultural identity and survival for non-Western societies'.<sup>26</sup> Defying the 'secular hegemony', rhetorically figured as the cultural expression of Western power, is a struggle for ideological sovereignty waged as fiercely as the political and territorial battles fought throughout the Muslim world. Because secularism must 'subjugate' all 'systems of belief' it is the imperial power par excellence, totalitarian since it determines you can have any belief you choose, so long as it is not useful in negotiating the future of society'.<sup>27</sup>

Anti-secularists correspondingly observe in the modernising state technologies and ideological resources with which to brutalise society. The secularisation of society has alienated the masses by stigmatising minority and even popular cultures in the public sphere, while the regime of individual rights has rationalised social relations so that 'traditional intercommunity ties' have been lost to development, depriving civil society of indigenous channels of political mediation.

Although Nandy is less forgiving in his critique of modernity than more moderate anti-secularists who might interrogate secularism within the conceptual framework of postcolonial 'catachresis', a common anti-secularist premise is that communal violence and ideology arise and are exacerbated by the power of the modernising, secularising state.

All to varying degrees subscribe to the view that the Indian state's attempts to 'create a nationality', fortifying the contours of a mainstream national culture by disciplining minorities into compliant cultural positions, has promoted intolerance towards minorities. What is evident in the anti-secularist reading of Hindutva is its

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<sup>26</sup> Merryl Wyn Davies & Ziauddin Sardar, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair* (London: Grey Seal, 1990) p.32.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.12.

recognition as a novel form of discrimination (peculiar to modern regimes) where religious difference operates as racial difference and without precedent in traditional India. Anti-secularists like Chatterjee, who quotes Sarkar's observation that 'the Muslim here becomes the near exact equivalent of the Jew', typify this sociological viewpoint.<sup>28</sup>

With the exercise of 'political modernism', where the culture of the majority 'usually comes to enjoy some primacy in the culture of an open polity', genuine multiculturalism cannot exist and liberal imaginaries are unable to cope with collective cultural rights. The anti-secularist imagination thus sees tragic causality between nationalism and ethnocide:

'The title [*Creating A Nationality*] represents the awareness that the chains of events we describe is the end-product of a century of effort to convert the Hindus into a 'proper' modern nation and a conventional ethnic majority and it has as its underside the story, which we have not told here, of corresponding efforts to turn the other faiths of the subcontinent into proper ethnic minorities and well-behaved minorities.(...) even the partial achievement of these goals is a minor tragedy, for its consequences cannot be anything but ethnocide in the long run.' <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sarkar, quoted in Chatterjee, p.1768.

<sup>29</sup> Nandy, vi. The unique endowments of citizenship are neglected in anti-secularist opinion on modernity. Citizenship is characteristically conceived of in negative terms, as status to be retracted or withdrawn by racist regimes, but very rarely discussed as an empowering principle. It is not distinguished from the rationalisation of social relations nor favourably compared with traditional modes of community membership. It is never, then, perceived as a possible means with which to interrogate State power since it's ideologically bundled together with the proliferation of rationalising

Anti-secularists conceive of communal violence as an asymmetrical exchange between the 'west' and the 'non-west'. The west here is not figured as a political bloc but as a psychological, epistemological and above all ideological presence in decolonised space. As Nandy himself explains, the ubiquity of the west is its most insidious aspect since 'the west is now everywhere, within the west and outside; in structures and in minds'.<sup>30</sup> These exchanges are asymmetric because they take place on sites of domination and conquest supported by the invasiveness of the nation state. In this scene of occupation, traditions and traditional cultures are depicted as vulnerable, exposed and endangered species constantly buffeted by relentless torrents of modernisation which decimate 'time worn Indian realities', razing institutions, communities and relations in the process.

The effects of the ideological colonisation of state and civil society has been the dislocating fragmentation that characterises the lives of 'average Indians'. The displacement of 'folk Hindu' religiosity from everyday life by processes of secularisation has left a conspicuous vacuum. Into this vacuum, misguided efforts have been made to habilitate forms of religion which are commensurable with Indian modernity, often for political gain. Hindutva is one such example of this distortion; religion refracted through rationalist modernity. It does not truthfully capture

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secularisation. Since it represents the dislocation of individuals from community to nation, intuitive filiation to coerced affiliation, citizenship is little more than a pathology of an atomising modernity.

<sup>30</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) xi.



traditional religiosity but abridges, corrupts and compresses Hinduism into a compromised palliative to ward off the blandness of modern life.<sup>31</sup>

Anti-secularists argue that the displacement of the traditional to the modern and the religious to the secular has been so comprehensive that it could not have been achieved through coercion alone but only by coercion braided with consent. It has been premised on the hegemonisation of a rationalist, 'scientized' view of society and history which preaches social evolution and the succession of the traditional by the modern. The religious, the traditional and the communal are assimilated to this world-view as inferior and primitive pathologies of an inadequately rationalised society.

It follows then that the only way Nandy believes it possible to preserve the elements of a traditional society (and thus to defer the psychological conditions under which Hindu nationalism attains salience) is to be *irrational*. That which cannot be assimilated to the rationalist worldview cannot, in his opinion, be subject to rationalisation.

Nandy seeks to oppose the 'imperialist dogmas' of secular rationality with a radical mode of dissent 'articulated in a language that will not be fully comprehensible to the other side of the global fence of academic respectability'.<sup>32</sup> This counter-cultural inscrutability is emphasised in the prefatory lines of *The*

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<sup>31</sup> Ironically, this is the same explanation for the resurgence of Hindutva given by Gurcharan Das in his ode to neo-liberalism *India Unbound*. Without a God or ideology, bourgeois life is reduced to the endless pursuit of cars, VCRs, cell phones, and channel surfing'. Gurcharan Das, *India Unbound: From Independence to the Global Information Age* (London: Profile: 2002) p.308.

<sup>32</sup> Nandy, quoted in Desai, p.81.

*Intimate Enemy* (1983) where he commends 'those who dare to defy the given modes of defiance'.<sup>33</sup>

Nandy's attitude is that the most radical act of minority defiance is to challenge the subjection of cultural practices to rational evaluation. The refusal of scrutiny to group outsiders becomes an act of resistance in itself, its most potent gesture to refuse the eye of the West (its 'oculus mundi') the right to gaze on 'subaltern' society. In *The Intimate Enemy* Nandy exhorts the non-west to throw down a challenge to the west by evolving and a singular discourse of resistance which would remain unintelligible on the other side of the imperial divide. Europe or the West has to be provincialised and only incubating native cultures, values and processes can do this. 'Critical traditionalism' defines itself as the imperative of the non-west to:

Talk to itself and of itself through its own language, so as to initiate a contemporary, unapologetic discourse concerning itself. This involves relearning the flexibility and dynamics of its own traditions and history. Only when its thought and debate are grounded in its own conceptual universe can it hope to create a new relationship with the Western world and author its own post-modern reality. This new discourse may require a fresh definition of our institutions, especially in the area of knowledge generation and transmission. (...) These structures must

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<sup>33</sup> He has expanded on this elsewhere. For instance he has written ' [we share] a conviction that professional and academic boundaries will have to be crossed to make sense of the problem, and the belief that the social pathologies in this part of the world will have to be grappled with on the basis of the inner strengths of the civilisation as expressed in the ways of life of its living carriers (...) It is not meant not so much for specialists researching ethnic violence as for intellectuals and activists trying to combat mass violence in the Southern societies unencumbered by the conceptual categories popular in the civilized world.' Nandy et al, xi.

revive a plethora of languages outside the Western imperium, each with its own vocabularies and concepts.<sup>34</sup>

It is obvious that Nandy considers 'critical traditionalism' not only to be a personal discourse of opposition, but a grand pedagogy for the oppressed, an insurrectionary cultural and discursive practice empowering the non-west to resist the colonization of its collective mind by the state, multinationals, western non-governmental organisations and cultural imperialism as a whole. Instead of being passive receptacles of Western culture, the aggregated Southern oppressed can take arms against the 'imperium' by 'reviving languages' that assert their subjectivity as autonomous cultural actors.

Partha Chatterjee's arguments for the legislative autonomy of religious communities in 'Secularism and Toleration' (1995) are a continuation of Nandy's anti-secularist politics. But whereas Nandy is concerned with the relation between India and the West in general terms, especially in *The Intimate Enemy*, Chatterjee's article directs those insights to the exploration of political possibilities within the 'domain of modern state institutions as they now exist in India'.<sup>35</sup> It's important to note that the article was written at the height of a BJP campaign for the imposition of a uniform civil code through a dissolution of Muslim personal law.

Chatterjee's proposal for the juridical sovereignty of minority communities arises through a heuristic opposition between secularism and toleration. Since he discerns

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<sup>34</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983)., xi.

<sup>35</sup> Chatterjee, pp.1776-7.

no obvious hostility between Hindutva and secularism, he, like Nandy, deduces that 'secularisation and religious toleration may sometimes work at cross-purposes'.<sup>36</sup>

Chatterjee models his insights on the intrusions of state power on Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality. He tellingly employs governmentality for the express purpose of evading the stringency of concepts of sovereignty and rights and to entertain the 'shifting locations of the politics of identity and difference'.<sup>37</sup> Through governmentality Chatterjee communicates the dynamics of rationality and resistance more artfully than Nandy. Nested within the freedom to practice is the freedom to exercise cultural difference and in that act, to broach the power of governmental technologies. Resisting the disciplinary hegemony of state authority by 'literally declar[ing] oneself unreasonable' politicises irrationality by claiming inscrutability as a normative right:

What is asserted in a collective cultural right is in fact the right not to offer a reason for being different. We have our own reasons for doing things the way we do, but since you don't share the fundamentals of our world-view, you will never come to understand or appreciate those reasons. Therefore leave us alone and let us mind our own business.<sup>38</sup>

The notion of governmentality refers to a form of disciplinary power which permeates the state-civil society border. It is Foucault's attempt to capture the ubiquity of modern power. The governmentalisation of the state is a process

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.1769.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.1774.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

comprised of juridical sovereignty on one hand, and governmental technology on the other. In practice, the latter envelops the former since technologies of governmentality pivot on the expansion of rationalisation. Chatterjee thus describes its mode of reasoning as 'a certain instrumental notion of economy and its apparatus an elaborate network of surveillance'.<sup>39</sup> To participate in that mode of reasoning is to recognise the legitimacy of governmental power, and accede to a form of self-discipline. Exercised as it is through representation and reason, governmentality legitimates and perpetuates itself through a flexible 'braiding of coercion and content'.<sup>40</sup>

Chatterjee argues that resisting the ubiquity of governmental discipline can only be premised on liberation from the technologies of disciplinary power. He proposes that given the envelopment of juridical sovereignty by technologies of governmental power, to evade the latter is to be placed beyond the scope of the former. The assertion of minority cultural rights is one of those sites where a disjuncture between the two can occur if the technologies of governmentality are successfully resisted. Social actors win autonomous sovereignty where this is accomplished. Chatterjee suggests that the only way to achieve sovereignty is 'literally to declare oneself unreasonable'.<sup>41</sup>

Since 'the respect for cultural diversity and different ways of life finds it impossible to articulate itself in the unitary rationalism of the language of rights',

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.1769.



collective cultural rights come down to the right to refuse to justify cultural practice in the dominant ethical idiom.<sup>42</sup>

To this end Chatterjee asks why, 'even when one asserts a basic incommensurability in frameworks of reason, does one nevertheless say we have our own reasons?'<sup>43</sup> When a community, religious or otherwise, declares itself unreasonable, Chatterjee asserts that it refuses to submit to the disciplinary power of the state. By refusing to engage with its administrative discourse the community cocoons itself from the incursions of governmentality.

Toleration appears as the social acceptance of that 'unreasonableness'. The community's right to autonomy is still predicated, despite its rightful unreasonableness to outsiders, on its accountability to its own members. Chatterjee qualifies the group's insistent right not to give reasons for doing things differently with the caveat that it explains itself adequately in its chosen forums.

The communitarian sympathy between Chatterjee's anti-secularism and Parekh's multiculturalism is fairly obvious here. Chatterjee's advocacy of self-governing communities operating on their own societal ethics echoes Parekh's working principle of 'operative public values.' These 'constitute the primary moral structure of a society's public life', which though 'never sacrosanct and non-negotiable' provide the 'context and point of orientation for all such discussions'.<sup>44</sup> These values both regulate the relations between its members and form a complex and 'loosely knit whole and provide a structured but malleable vocabulary of public

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.1773.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p.263.

discourse'.<sup>45</sup> Consistent with Nandy's critique of liberal modernity, Parekh identifies 'historically inherited cultural structure[s]' which inform its conduct in public life'. Modifying that structure in the name of political modernisation can result in 'widespread disorientation, anxiety and even resistance'.<sup>46</sup>

In these recognisably communitarian arguments both Parekh and Chatterjee are attempting to relativise liberalism by presenting the case for fairness in non-liberal societies. But whereas Parekh's stipulation for 'non-liberal operative public values' is the observation of a minimum of universal prohibitions (slavery, torture, rape) Chatterjee's only reservation is for (democratic) accountability *within* the community.

The difference between Parekh and Chatterjee (and by extension Nandy) is an urgent one. While Parekh is comfortable with the existence of cultural diversity within a discourse of rights, or of similarity with difference, Chatterjee is more circumspect about the rational scrutiny of cultural practice, since this would be to tantamount to a submission to disciplinary power.

This is not to deny that Parekh has no discomfort with secularist principles. His stem from a belief that India's national democratic culture cannot be guaranteed by state recognition of individual rights without acknowledging its singular religiosity. The Indian state has to recognise that religion oxygenates India's very way of life. To deny the centrality of religion is to 'make people speak in secular languages'

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.293.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.263.

introducing 'self-alienation' and subjecting them to 'disadvantages', 'by requiring them to speak in a language different to the one in which they think'.<sup>47</sup>

For Parekh secularism can only be a 'simple-minded solution' to the problem of communal conflict since by universalising the operative public values of liberal societies, it conceals its cultural bias. The 'great political project' of Indian democracy, by contrast, requires a 'historically sensitive imagination, a culturally attuned intelligence, and a shrewd sense of political possibilities.' He perceives little evidence of these qualities among the acolytes of the BJP nor among their secular opponents 'whose thinking has advanced little since Nehru's death.'<sup>48</sup>

He doesn't go so far as to state that these values are incommensurable with those from other cultures, only that that these are articulated in distinctive idioms and may privilege values other than those universalized by the liberal worldview. Integral to his commission for intercultural dialogue is the supposition that it is possible to appeal to universal values as long as that appeal is mindful of cultural definitions of reason so that they are related to their 'moral and cultural structure of the society concerned'.<sup>49</sup>

Anti-secularist ideas for religious toleration are flawed for two overriding reasons. Firstly, they grossly caricature traditional communities as fair societies and are critically blind to the infringement of rights which occur under the sign of the community. Secondly, they overstate the evaporation of communal institutions in Indian modernity, oversimplify the rationalisation of social relations as comprehensive individuation, and overestimate the secularisation of Indian politics.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.323.

<sup>48</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, 'Making Sense of Gujarat,' *Seminar* 417 (2002)p.31.

<sup>49</sup> Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* p.293.

The most obvious fallacy propagated by anti-secularism is the egalitarianism of traditional Indian society. Anti-secularists' silence on caste oppression and gender inequality speaks eloquently of their biased portrait of traditional or 'folk' values. The commonplace cruelties of all premodern societies merits no comment from any anti-secularist critic, unless cited in remonstrance with the exaggerations of 'modernist' and secular critics.

Meera Nanda (2002 & 2003) argues that postcolonial epistemologies, such as those articulated in the name of anti-secularism, have disarmed the Left by simplifying the epistemic victimhood of the non-West. By failing to register the suppression or syndication of a multiplicity of traditions in the coming to supremacy of a dominant cultural idiom, they have neglected the illiberalism of those 'minor' national cultures:

The problem, however, lies in that what appears to be marginal from the point of view of the modern West, is not marginal at all in non-Western societies which haven't yet experienced a significant secularisation of their cultures. Local knowledge that Western critics assume to be standpoints of the "oppressed" are in fact, deeply embedded in the dominant religious/cultural idiom of non-Western societies (...) 'Those who appear to be "innocent" because of their victimization by the West. The problem is that those who appear as

“victims” from a global anti-Enlightenment vantage point are actually the beneficiaries of traditional cultural legitimations’.<sup>50</sup>

The populism that animates anti-secularist politics has propagated a critical blindness to the multiple sites of power and minority. The corollary of a polity that bows before the religious is an intelligentsia prostrate before the popular. Achin Vanaik (1997) accuses Nandy of ‘applying the critical edge of his thinking overwhelmingly to modernity’ and the same could be said of many of the populists who smother secularism, under a litany of sins against the popular, whether this is cast as cultural imperialism, elitism or even atheism. Crucially, this has not been willingly balanced against an assessment of what the popular or the traditional (themselves often casually conflated) *exclude*.<sup>51</sup>

The genuflection to the popular, what Edward Said regards as the ‘dangers and temptations’ that Orientalism poses in postcolonial modernity, is a capitulation to the seductions of community and filiation, at the expense of the critical task of heeding the spectre of minority which haunts the very invocation of the popular. It renders invisible the dialectical production of majority and minority which foreshadows the victory of the popular. Amir Mufti (2000) identifies this as the great danger of populism, since it

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<sup>50</sup> Nanda, p.175.

<sup>51</sup> Sumit Sarkar: ‘What regularly happens in such arguments is a simultaneous narrowing and widening of the term secularism, its deliberate use as a wildly free-floating signifier. It becomes a polemical target which is both single and conveniently multivalent. Secularism, in the first place, gets equated with aggressive anti-religious scepticism, virtually atheism, through a unique identification with the Enlightenment.’ *The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies*, in Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.) *Subaltern Studies and Mapping the Postcolonial* (London: Verso: 2000) p.311.



reinforces and naturalises, in the name of a numerical (that is, quantative) majority of abstract citizens - as against the tiny minority that is the national elite – the privileges of a cultural (that is qualitative) majority. In this sense as well, its procedures are no different from those of the same time normalizes certain cultural practices as representative of ‘the people’ as such.<sup>52</sup>

The anti-secularist imagination ignores that the inverse of identification with the popular, as with the elite, is a necessary alienation or exclusion from it. What is overlooked by a critical privilege of the ‘operative public values’ of a society is an awareness of those oppressed by those values and a corresponding concern of how power is held accountable under regimes of community values. Secularism does not only allow for a relationship between ‘politics and ethics separated from religion’, as Vanaik argues, but also for a relationship between individuals and authority independent of religious interference. Secularism can therefore be seen to prefigure endowment of citizenship. Kelly (2001) concludes that despite its best intentions, Parekh’s core principle of operative public values, which underwrites Nandy and Chatterjee’s demands for societal inscrutability, is simply ‘too communitarian’:

It places too much emphasis on ‘how we do things around here’ in order to address concerns about the impartiality and the false neutrality of liberalism, with its unfortunate history of imperialism. Parekh’s

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<sup>52</sup> Amir Mufti, ‘Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, secular criticism, and the question of minority culture’ in Paul A. Bove (ed) *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*, (Durham: Duke University Press: 2000) pp.248-9.

theory has nowhere to go but the internal view of a particular society and culture. Yet it is precisely the authority of such internal perspectives that multiculturalists wish to challenge in their quest for recognition and inclusion'.<sup>53</sup>

Political claims for absolute cultural difference do not advance minority interests but those of traditional hierarchy. The resources for dissent within traditional societies are inherently limited and it is precisely their overwhelming character which is definitive.<sup>54</sup> And as Chetan Bhatt (1997) contends, the expression of epistemological, ethical or moral exceptionalism of any culture is a familiar symptom of all contemporary forms of religious authoritarianism. He argues that endorsing these cultural claims of incommensurability by placing them beyond the analytic reach of reason plays into the hands of reactionary religious movements. A progressive anti-fundamentalism would insist on subjecting them to a putative universal critique:

In fact, the claim to dissimilarity, difference, closure and uniqueness is a foundational declaration of religious and racist movements and it is this authority that they now use to disavow critical assessment or political challenge. Versions of Spivak's argument that reason is Eurocentric (1993b) or Bhabha's arguments on foundational

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Kelly, 'Identity, Equality and Power: Tensions in Parekh's Political Theory of Multiculturalism', *Multiculturalism, Identity and Rights*, ed. Bruce Haddock & Peter Sutch (London: Routledge, 2003). p.106.

<sup>54</sup> Vanaik, p.177.

incommensurability are rehearsed by those same movements as legislative norms.<sup>55</sup>

The second, definitive flaw in anti-secularist reasoning derives from its overwhelming caricature of the secularisation of the Indian polity and by extension of the demise of communitarianism in Indian society. The first point to be made is that India's political culture has not been profoundly relocated from the contested field of 'modern or traditional values' because the modern has never been conceptually free of the traditional (particularly the religious). Hindu nationalism cannot therefore be a psychological 'reaction' to the secularisation of either polity or society because neither has been seriously undertaken.

Jawaharlal Nehru posed the development issue as one of moulding the nation in the enlightened image of the state. This explicit paternalism understood the ignorance and superstition of the masses as the primary obstacle to national development. In public announcements, the Nehruvian state made no efforts to conceal its condescension to the Indian masses. In the draft of the first Five Year Plan (1951), it was stated that:

[Certain] conditions have to be fulfilled before the full flow of the people's energy for the task of the national reconstruction can be

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<sup>55</sup>Chetan Bhatt, *Liberation and Purity* (London: UCL Press, 1997) p.35.

assured. The ignorance and apathy of large numbers have to be overcome.<sup>56</sup>

The 'conditions' Nehru refers to here are those which allow 'the people' to appreciate the rational drive of the developmental state. It is a call for the 'enlightenment' of the masses as a prerequisite for the modernisation of the nation. For the masses to realise the direction the nation was to take, it needed to share the state's vision of progress. The core values of 'scientific secularism' (which became synonymous with Nehruvianism) were intended to be drip-fed to the people through a national infrastructure spearheaded by education and health care programmes. The state's adoption of Western scientific methods in medicine and engineering were intended to be exemplary of the spirit of scientific secularism.

But while outwardly disassociated from the state and regarded as an obstacle to collective social progress, religion was still publicly pronounced as a determinate influence on 'inner' development.<sup>57</sup> Religious consciousness (of which Nehru became increasingly associated with in his later years) was advocated for the progress of the individual.<sup>58</sup> Though this does not necessarily contravene secular principles, it diminished the prospects for embedding a secular polity. The spectacle

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<sup>56</sup> The Government of India (1951), cited in T.B. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Hindu Nationalism and Democracy in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1999) p.47.

<sup>57</sup> 'What then is religion (to use the word in spite of its obvious disadvantages)? Probably it consists of the inner development of the individual, the evolution of his consciousness in a certain direction which is considered good. What the direction is will again be a matter for debate. But, as far as I understand it, religion lays stress on the inner change and considers outward change as but the projection of this inner development. There can be no doubt that this inner development powerfully influences the outer environment' Jawarharlal Nehru, *Jawarharlal Nehru: An Anthology* (ed.) Sarvepalli Gopal (Delhi:Oxford University Press, 1980) p.473.

<sup>58</sup> For more on this, see Michael Brecher. *Nehru: A Political Biography* (London: Oxford University Press: 1959).

of state officials undertaking Hindu rituals in public office - an occurrence that continues to the present day – exemplifies the pollution of the secular by the religious. Political discourse in India has always been sacralized to some extent:

Nehruvian socialism mostly meant a formal nod to secular ideals, with very little principled commitment to them. There is substance to these concerns. As I will argue here, the battle for secularism and humanism was never joined at the terrain of culture; the secularists – and here not just the Nehruvian liberals but all other left intellectuals share the blame – never adequately challenged the pervasive and reactionary influence of religious thought on the hearts and minds of Indians.<sup>59</sup>

The ‘scientific temper’ which the Nehruvian era promised to usher in has never been fully accepted into Indian society and the inadequate secularisation of Indian public office persists. This ‘democracy under the spell of *dharma*’, ‘secularism without secularists’, has perpetuated secular genuflection to religiosity. In a political culture held hostage by divinity, the progressive encroachment of the Hindu Right on state power has only consolidated its ‘saffronization’. Indian secularism, like India’s unique modernity as a whole, remains, an ‘unfinished project’.<sup>60</sup> It cannot be judged until it emerges from the shadow of the traditional and the religious.

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<sup>59</sup> Meera Nanda. *Breaking the Spell of Dharma: The Case for Indian Enlightenment* (New Delhi: ThreeEssaysPress:2002)p.175.

<sup>60</sup> Jurgen Habermas ‘Modernity: An Unfinished Project’, in Passerin d’Entrèves, Maurizio and Benhabib, Seyla (eds) *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on ‘The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity’* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996) p.51.



Another aspect of Indian modernity which is oversimplified by anti- secularists is the supposedly irreversible decline of communitarianism in modern society, and in particular intercommunity relations capable of moderating communal violence. This is ably contradicted by Ashutosh Varshney's flawed but illuminating sociological study of the geographic distribution of Hindu and Muslim communal violence, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (2002). Varshney's analysis carries insights into how secular, affiliative networks are able to confound the majoritarian agenda.

He argues that the debate over secularism has neglected the ground level civic structures which organise communities locally. As Varshney states in his methodological outline, this has been the organising principle for his own study. The methodological inadequacies of previous studies have been the 'scale of aggregation' with an unwarranted focus at the national and global level of analysis. Sociological orthodoxies focus exclusively on why ethnic violence occurs, and ignore the comparative question of why it occurs in some places but not others. His conclusion is that we look no further than the institution of organisational civil life:

Where such networks of engagement exist, tensions and conflicts were regulated and managed; where they are missing, communal identities led to endemic and ghastly violence. As already stated; these networks can be broken down into two parts; associational forms of engagement and everyday forms of engagement. The former ties are in organisational settings; the latter require no organisation. Both forms of

engagement, if intercommunal, promote peace, but the capacity of the associational forms to withstand national level “exogenous shocks” – such as India’s partition in 1947 or the demolition of the Baburi mosque in December 1992 in full public gaze by Hindu militants- is substantially higher.<sup>61</sup>

What emerges with greatest poignancy from the study is that of all associations, those that most successfully immunize societies from ethnic violence promote *interdependence* between its members. Exemplary of this are trade unions that unify religious groups with common working interests.<sup>62</sup> Where communities are localised around industries and economic activities which employ communities in mutually binding occupations and do not allow them to segregate along religious lines, they tend to be less riot-prone.

The crucial factor in their success appears to be the intractability of this interdependence. Where Varshney finds a predominantly Hindu proprietary class employing a Muslim workforce in the textile industries of Ahmedabad for example, violence is against the interests of both parties. Since the skills of the workforce are not easily transferred (due to accumulated dexterity on the part of the weavers) it’s not possible to simply switch from a Muslim to a Hindu labour force:

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<sup>61</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (London: Yale University Press, 2002).p.9.

<sup>62</sup> Varshney sketchily draws some correlations between the demise of trade union activity and the levels of communal violence. The Keralese Marxist E. M. S. Namboodiripad, writing in 1979, had himself written glowingly of the ability of trade unions and *Kisan sabhas* to ‘bring people together in joint struggles on economic, political as well as socio-cultural issues cutting across all differences of castes, religious communities and other sectarian groups.’ E M S Namboodiripad, ‘Caste Conflicts vs Growing Unity of Popular Democratic Forces’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 1979.

Mass level intercommunal civic structures thus have the effect of moderating the communal right wing. Where is the room for a passionate argument for Muslim disloyalty to the nation and a “targeting” of Muslims for “punishment” if one depends on Muslims for profits, for a living, for civic order? <sup>63</sup>

This is starkly realised in cities that bear deep socio-economic stratifications. The cartographic distribution of violence in the Gujarati city of Surat demonstrates the importance of civic engagement. Whereas the Old City, suffused with guilds and professional network was quick to stabilise itself in the immediate breakout of violence, the slums and shantytowns in the ‘new’ areas of the city were several times more riot prone. The lack of civil institutional infrastructure meant that no communication took place between the ethnic factions in the slums.

Other conclusions Varshney draws are contestable. His unwillingness to take sides in the modern- traditional debate would seem to be refuted by his own evidence; the most successful forms of civil engagement are those coalesced around industrial interdependence that are also predominantly urban.<sup>64</sup> The trade union movements have been central to the fortunes of violence control in his case studies. That they affiliate on voluntary grounds and erode ascriptive (religious) groupings is of key consideration here. The provision of social space where individuals can act as secular citizens is a unique feature of modern civil society. It is also a closed

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.215.

<sup>64</sup> This can be attributed to the intellectual debts he holds to Ashis Nandy, and by extension to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

opportunity in the anti-secularist imagination, where state power is conceived to be contested or negotiated through the cultural community.

Anti-secularism's fixation on the colonial frontier as the site of cultural violence means it is fighting a battle which has long been lost, and against forms of power which have long been eclipsed by sophisticated mutations of nationalism which have instrumental sympathies with shape-shifting capitalist regimes. The traditional communities it shelters behind in the hope of insulation from modernisation's whirlwind are warped recollections of a stagnant imagination, as distorted as the rehabilitations of a Vedic golden age summoned by Hindu nationalism from India's prehistory. They exist only in corrupted and de-legitimised forms where integralism - like that of the fabled Hindu *rashtra* - rules sovereign over individual rights. In confrontation with the majoritarian nexus between neo-liberalism and Hindutva it is only 'resistance identities' that are able to register the complexities of contemporary oppression and deprivation without herding everything under the rubric of cultural imperialism that can emerge as the sites where effective challenges can be made.

In spite of its obvious oversights and weaknesses, it would be facile to brand anti-secularism as Hindutva's epistemological seedbed. Through its affiliations with environmental, intellectual and artistic movements it's able to bring swathes of the 'new' Left under its political compass. It's also been adopted by an influential faction within the subaltern studies project, part of what Vinayak Chaturvedi (somewhat generously) characterises as the 'problem of conceiving an agenda of how to re-imagine Marxism within the cultural logic of capitalism'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Vinayak Chaturvedi, Introduction to *Mapping Subaltern Studies* (see Sarkar above), xi.

This reorientation of that project from ‘Thompsonian social history’ to the post-structuralist critiques of ‘cultural studies’ confirmed a distinct wariness to Marxism, due as much to a withering of class-consciousness – conceded both by Achin Vanaik and Sumit Sarkar - as much to the European provenance of Marxism.<sup>66</sup> This ‘critical engagement with the enlightenment’, though locally aligned with the dubious politics of anti-modern neo-traditionalism, cannot be isolated from a global scepticism of liberalism and Marxism, undertaken not in the name of postcolonial epistemology but in the fallout of political failure. Liberalism, for example, cannot easily accommodate group rights into its normative vocabularies of justice. Neither, as Dipesh Chakrabarty points out in ‘Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism’ (1995), can it speak to the religious inspiration of public ethics.<sup>67</sup> These, remember, are exactly the criticisms ranged against the inadequacy of liberal rights by multiculturalists in Britain and Canada.

This sense of political failure is no different even if more acute in India. As Vanaik explains, the rise of authoritarian nationalism is best seen as the ‘consequence of the collapse of the postcolonial project institutionalised in 1947’. Its decline, and that of the Congress, has been ‘the condition for the rise of the Sangh Combine’.<sup>68</sup> Even more specifically than that, the failure has been that of failing to join the battle for secularism and humanism ‘at the terrain of culture’ for which, as Nanda correctly observes, ‘all Left intellectuals share the blame’.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Vanaik (1997) mourns the working class as ‘deradicalised and demoralised in the post WWII era’ while Sarkar (2000) admits to the withering of hopes of radical transformation through popular initiative’.

<sup>67</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism,’ *Economic and Political Weekly* April 8 (1995).p.753.

<sup>68</sup> Vanaik, p.284.

<sup>69</sup> Nanda. *Breaking the Spell of Dharma*, p.175.



I'm therefore arguing that anti-secularism should not be summarily dismissed as a hothouse for Hindutva, as in Radhika Desai's Marxist *Slouching Towards Ayodhya* (2002) or Meera Nanda's rationalist *Prophets Facing Backwards* (2002) and *Breaking the Spell of Dharma* (2003), but regarded as the begged question of the organised Left's arid response to Hindu nationalism. It has proven far easier to demolish the rational and rhetorical bases of anti-secularism and decry the defection of anti-secularists to a 'shared discursive space' with Hindutva than to interrogate the failure of the Left to capture the Indian public imagination and consequently to check the ascendancy of cultural nationalism. I want to suggest that anti-secularism, like multiculturalism, is provocative but not debilitating.

While recognising the depth to which Hindutva has saffronized the state and civil society, it is crucial that we dismantle the adversarial dichotomies of the anti-secular and the secular so that the debate does not stagnate in essentialist attrition. Holding the two in creative, dialectical tension is more germane to the creation of a genuine human rights culture than deadening adherence. The political inability to embed constitutional principles in civil society does not warrant their dissolution, as anti-secularists would encourage, but neither can these principles bypass the lived values neglected by austere advocates of 'pure' secularism. Engaging secularist humanism 'at the level of culture' so that they may be 'owned' by social actors requires a concession to the worldliness of anti-secularism.

It demands a recognition from the orthodox Left that culture and religion are not merely structuring categories of thought, 'false consciousness', but also lived experiences. Anti-secularist priorities draw attention to the need for a 'culturally

attuned intelligence' through which human rights values might be popularised.<sup>70</sup>

Secularist sensibilities, meanwhile, enable us to judge the distinction between a defence of the 'politics and ideology of secularism in cultural terms', a 'civilisationally anchored understanding of pluralist democracy' and the appropriation of those standards by cultural nationalism.<sup>71</sup>

To expand on what I've described here as the need for dialectical engagement between the secular and the anti-secular, I shall detail Marxist strategies to reverse the mass communalisation of state and civil society.

Orthodox Marxism has made recourse to state nationalism in answer to the 'secularism' question. Its commitment to secular individualism has often meant a *de facto* endorsement of a secular nationalism, since it is only on the terrain of nationalism that Gramsci's 'national popular' will can be mobilised, and on this terrain that the forces of 'a fully articulated fascist national project' has been arrayed.<sup>72</sup> Aijaz Ahmad has made the fullest articulation of this project in *Lineages of the Present* (2000) and the anthology of essays *Of Communalisation and Globalisation* (2003).

In the breach of civic cultures lie what Ahmad (2003) describes as 'cultures of cruelty', global and historical accompaniments to right wing politics. These cultures of cruelty, dormant but structurally immanent in all capitalist society, both feed into the objectives and are routinised by the Right. Ahmad defines the values of these

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<sup>70</sup> Parekh, 'Reflections on Gujarat', p.31.

<sup>71</sup> As in the Sangh Combine's declaration that India is 'secular' by virtue of being Hindu. Varshney. p.84.

<sup>72</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *Of Communalisation and Globalisation* (New Delhi: ThreeEssaysPress, 2003) p.36.

‘cultures of cruelty’ as the reflexes of an atrophied moral outrage, the numbed normalisation of brutality:

‘I mean a much wider web of social sanctions in which one kind of violence can be tolerated all the more because many other kinds of violence are tolerated anyway. Dowry deaths do facilitate the burning of women out of communal motivations, and together, these two kinds of violences do contribute to the making of a more generalised culture of cruelty as well as a more generalized ethical numbness towards cruelty as such. And when I speak of right wing politics and the cultures of cruelty, I undoubtedly refer to the cultures of cruelties that the Hindutva right wing is creating, methodically and in cold blood, in pursuit of what strikes me as a fascist project’.<sup>73</sup>

Both civil and state forms of violence generate what he terms an ‘ethical numbness’ of which majoritarian organisations and dominant classes are the main beneficiaries because while their ‘sheer scale and persistence’ promote ‘moral numbness’, they also ‘maintain a rigid wall that separates the powerful from the powerless’.<sup>74</sup>

Such permissiveness to violence, Ahmad argues, is suggestive of an endemic illiberalism or an absent ‘culture of civic virtues’. He suggests that staving off the threat of ‘cultures of cruelty’ on the nationalist stage requires the Left to pose an

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.81.

<sup>74</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Verso, 2000), p.230. p.293.

alternative nationalism to strengthen a culture of civic virtues, grounded in liberalism and a commitment to secularism.<sup>75</sup>

Ahmad sets great stall by the democratic pedagogies engendered by Leftist nationalism which, by bearing the 'revolutionary value of secularism', would be counterpoised to the counter-revolutionary compulsions of Hindutva's fascist project. A commitment to Left-wing secular nationalism can best guarantee a culture of civility because Indian oscillation from the Left to the Right is historically dependent on the inclination of the Centre:

Whether a culture of civic virtues or a culture of hate and cruelty prevails in our country has depended, in general, on the actual balance of forces among these competing visions, which we could also describe as visions associated with the Left, the Centre, and the Right, respectively. Whether or not the Right can be contained will depend, in other words, on whether or not the Centre will hold and incline, for its own survival if not anything else, towards the Left.<sup>76</sup>

He argues that India's political culture is rigidly hinged on the currency of competing nationalisms because the structures of capitalism are mature relative to processes of state formation (especially overburdened in India by the competing claims of class, gender, regional and religious affiliations) to the point where

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<sup>75</sup> 'In India, at least, it has not been possible to uphold ideas of constitutional democracy or socialist equality without a prior politics of secular civility. The opposition between secularism and fascism, in a country such as ours, is thus not incidental but integral.' Ahmad, *Of Communalisation*, see p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present*, p.291.

periodic crises erupt from this disjuncture. Ahmad suggests that to resolve these crises an 'ideological cement of a nationalist kind is an objective necessity'.

If the demand for this ideological cement is not met by the Left, then it will almost certainly precipitate the collapse of the liberal Centre and an 'aggressive kind of rightist nationalism will step into that vacuum'.<sup>77</sup> The Left's horizon therefore *must* be nationalist in scope to contest the rostrum from which the Right stage manages India's political culture. Ahmad ascribes the impotence and invisibility of anti fascist mobilizations in recent years to their 'dispersed' and 'mutually discrete' character and their essentially local provenance, which bear 'none of the advantages of initiative that moments of concentration bring'.<sup>78</sup> The imperative for the Left is to wrest the initiative from the Hindu Right by instituting secularism at the very apex of the national frame– the state - from where it can 'take hold of national culture through an organized political force'.<sup>79</sup>

Vanaik (1997) similarly proposes that resistance against the political formations of Hindutva can be organised through a coalition appearing as the 'third force in Indian politics'. He believes such an alliance would synergise the identity politics of an assembly of oppressed groups – Dalits, peasants, and women. Vanaik does not exclude the class determinations of India's oppressed either, acknowledging that such a coalition would be inadequate unless it were joined with the 'class politics of reform, welfare and empowerment'. He suggests that it is only through such an

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<sup>77</sup> Ahmad, *Of Communalisation*, p.23.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.37. 'It was the collapse of a Left-liberal kind of nationalism that provided the major opening for a fascist kind of nationalism, which set out, then, to exploit the weaknesses of that earlier nationalism and to formulate a different national agenda,' p.23.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.36.



integrated alliance that the deep process of communalisation in the polity could be stemmed and ultimately reversed.

There are suppositions in both Vanaik and Ahmad's argument that need to be debunked. The first is that any variant nationalism can be culturally 'dry' and mobilise solely on the basis of statist ethics. The second (related) premise is that civil society is the *de facto* reflection of the state.

Ahmad's conceit of Leftist nationalism as the font of cultural civility runs counter to Edward Said's of the secular by suggesting that nationalism can offer a clean transcendence of religious or ethnic difference. Said's 'catachrestic', idiosyncratic rendering of the secular derives from his deeply held belief that any worthwhile critical imperative draws its strength from its externality to power. The secular consciousness is to be cherished because it stands as a permanent critique of 'the mass institutions that dominate modern life.' No such critique is ethically possible from within the nationalist frame. It is through this reasoning that Said, *contra* Ahmad, and Vanaik, does not oppose the secular to the religious but to nation and nationalism. He sets the ideal of 'secular interpretation and secular work' against

submerged feelings of identity, of tribal solidarity (...) geographically and homogenously defined. The dense fabric of secular life (...) can't be herded under the rubric of national identity or can't be made entirely to respond to this phony idea of a paranoid frontier separating 'us' from 'them' – which is a repetition of the old sort of orientalist model. The

politics of secular interpretation proposes a way (...) of avoiding the pitfalls of nationalism.<sup>80</sup>

Ahmad's depiction of the bonds of secular nationalism as inviolably affiliative is based on a selective arrangement of India's democratic history. In answer to Spivak's declaration that 'no adequate referent' for 'democracy, socialism, constitutionalism and citizenship may be advanced from postcolonial space' tacitly coded as they are with the 'legacy of imperialism', Ahmad attests in 'The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality' (1995) that the 'precise aim of the anti-colonial movement was to institute citizenship and to put in place a constitutionality that was derived not from colonial authority but from a constituent assembly.'<sup>81</sup>

But Ahmad's is a history of convenience: crediting the *Swaraj* movement to its liberal inspirations camouflages the popular purchase afforded by the catholic but irreducibly 'filiative' rhetoric of Gandhian culturalism. The Congress vision of a free India was, after all, the progeny of a compromise between bourgeois and popular nationalisms. Nehru's ode to the survival of India's cultural spirit in *A Discovery of India* (1960) is a testimony that even his secular socialism was coloured by cultural fraternity.

The point is that Ahmad deliberately disregards that nationalist community – in India as elsewhere – is an affiliative community in which the degradations of identitarianism inhere. It is impossible to propose a Leftist secular nationalism which can overwrite the rhetoric of cultural singularity which brought the nation into being.

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<sup>80</sup> Edward Said, interview by Jennifer Wicke and Michael Sprinkler, in *Edward W. Said: A Critical Reader* (ed) Michael Sprinkler (London: Blackwell: 1992) p.232-3.

<sup>81</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, 'The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality', *Race & Class* 36:1 (1995) p.5.

Neither can it successfully invoke a 'national popular will' without invoking those same fraternal instincts.

There is a wilful suppression in that argument, too, of the bourgeois moorings of Indian secularism. Ahmad's resolution cannot answer back to Faisal Fatehali Devji's (1992) pseudo-anti-secularist complaint that secular nationalism has been thoroughly appropriated by the ruling elite so that it has come to resemble a 'kind of state fundamentalism, a sort of self-legitimising mode of coercion that ends up generating its own nemesis in the communalism it demonises'.<sup>82</sup> It's also vulnerable to accusations from religious minorities who feel as coerced into elite secularity and as they are threatened from the 'assimilative pressures of the Hindu right wing', something consistently unregistered by the 'scholarly' imagination.<sup>83</sup>

This kind of accusation is invited by the all too narrow identification of secular nationalism with the state in Vanaik's and even Ahmad's prescriptions. Both Vanaik's parliamentary solutions and Ahmad's determination to seize the initiative through an appropriation of 'state power' through which national culture could 'be taken hold of' typify the paternalism of the Left, reminiscent of Nehruvianism's early personality.<sup>84</sup>

The secular remains something abstract to be declared, dictated and disseminated rather than acted, performed and owned. For secularism to acquire the currency of Gramscian 'common sense', the Left has to contest symbolic space between religious communities and the state: namely that of embattled civil societies. This is

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<sup>82</sup> Faisal Fatehali Devji, 'Hindu/Muslim/Indian', *Public Culture* 5 (1) (Fall 1992) p.5.

<sup>83</sup> Omar Khalidi, 'Muslims in Indian Political Process: Group Goals and Alternative Strategies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 2-9, 1993, p.51.

<sup>84</sup> Ahmad, *On Communalism and Globalisation*, p.36.

the ground on which secular identities can be formed, the power of the state negotiated and citizen action asserted.

Even if a secularist state was able to arrest and possibly even reverse the deep communalisation of the polity and its agencies it remains unclear how this might transform everyday domestic life, where as Ahmad argues, the sanction for state barbarism is acquired.

As Ahmad acknowledges, the Sangh Combine are not anticipating a 'frontal [electoral] seizure of power' but preparing the ground for a 'hurricane from below.'<sup>85</sup> The cultures of cruelty he speaks of, those routinised, desensitising acts of class, caste and gender violence, foreshadow the brutality of the state. It is commonplace social violence which shoulders the kind of 'authoritarian personality' on which a fascist project rests.<sup>86</sup> The Sangh Parivar have long realised that state control alone cannot guarantee the mandate for its fascism and has correspondingly sought to impose its presence throughout civil society where it can be a more immediate influence in the intimate spaces of the local community and the family. While it is true to say that Hindutva has only achieved its current influence because of its nationalist scope, it is equally important to recognise that it has only been able to sustain nationalist ambitions by cultivating the molecular development of majoritarian 'common sense'. It has done that by progressively capturing those social spaces able to mediate between communities, preventing individuals from evolving secular identities as citizens.

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<sup>85</sup> Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present*, p.299.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

The corollary of ‘mass level intercommunal civic structures’, ‘moderating the communal right wing’ is the escalation of communalisation, communal violence and the consolidation of Hindutva power.<sup>87</sup> It is no coincidence that all authoritarian regimes have systematically sought to destroy or colonise the spaces in which such forms of civil engagement can take place (the same can be said of totalitarian Marxist regimes).

Mumbai’s Hindu extremist *Shiv Sena*, for example, have formed a tight communal-criminal nexus that binds slum-dwellers – predominantly male youth – into forms of ‘civic engagement’ which promote anything but secular identities (the gang-rape of Muslim prostitutes is an example of their bonding activities).<sup>88</sup> The tentacles of the RSS *shakha* network are another such associational structure (an example of the ‘cadre based political parties’ Varshney refers to) which militates against the interests of intercommunal dialogue and the evolution of secular identities.

The *Shiv Sena*’s activities are of a piece with the foundational aims of Hindutva, which are to transform the deepest levels of civil society by circumventing the irritating safeguards of constitutionality and legality. The creeping emergence of religious public spheres has exposed the authoritarian and the democratic potential of civil society, where the prevailing order is not ‘determined by rights and the free association of individuals, but one governed by responsibilities, individual sacrifice,

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<sup>87</sup>Varshney, p.215.

<sup>88</sup> For more on the ‘provincialisation’ of Mumbai by the Shiva Sena see Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).



order, conformity, 'man-moulding', discipline and collective strength for a greater purpose, namely the Hindu nation.'<sup>89</sup>

The absorption of secularism into cultural common sense is contingent on the inclination of these spaces of civil engagement since the organisation of the Hindutva complex is well advanced of the Left, which have long depended on the now defunct and moribund Congress organisations. Varshney avers that 'the BJP has filled the organisational void created by the Congress. It has the cadres and the ideological commitment'.<sup>90</sup>

I would like to submit that for success in a long-term 'war of position' with Hindutva, Ahmad's and Vanaik's imaginaries of secular nationalism are, to borrow the former's own description, 'necessary, but insufficient'. The innovative propagation of ideas that Ahmad identifies in the RSS' sixty-year strategy is the implied but unspoken conclusion of his own analysis.

The proliferation of initiatives such as Mumbai's *mohalla* committees, forums for dialogic co-operation for slum-dwelling Hindus and Muslims and the police, is integral to the ownership of the secular by citizen-actors. Though these committees were initiated at the behest of the Deputy Commissioner of Police to moderate the fall out of the VHP's Ayodhya campaigns, they have since proliferated into diverse

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<sup>89</sup> Chetan Bhatt, 'Democracy and Hindu Nationalism' *Democratization*, 11 (4), August 2004, pp.145-6.

<sup>90</sup>Varshney, p.242. Varshney's ambivalence to the Sangh is another major cloud over his study. Throughout *Ethnic Conflict* Varshney exonerates politicians and places responsibility on the shoulders of the citizens. His colourless assessment of the BJP attests to the negligence he pays to nationalist imaginations of India. He even goes so far as to describe Hindu nationalists as 'bridge builders'.

cross-community activities such as sports events, and inter-religious festival celebrations.<sup>91</sup>

Innovative activity such as the *mohalla* committees, which bring individuals out of ethnic or religious community into forms of civic community, encapsulate the spirit of socially owned secularism. The task for the Left is to personalise the secular as the Right has personalised the communal. Expanding the national project of secularism and human rights will invariably necessitate the democratisation of those concepts into forms of performance, agency and citizenship action.

What I have suggested in outlining the excesses of both anti secularist and secularist positions is the simple futility of polarised imaginaries. Anti-secularists privilege the community but efface the universal while secularists have typically been fixated by national concerns without adopting a molecular approach to the cultivation of secular reflexes. Neither 'answer to the new political configuration of our times' since while state secularists lapse into the 'easy recuperation and celebration of the older socialist and nationalist utopias' anti-secularists lurch towards the 'outright rejection of the possibilities of decolonisation and global solidarity'.<sup>92</sup> Community and culture should not be dirty words for the secular Left and secularism itself should not be irrationally stigmatised as the instrument of atomisation. As *mohalla* committees and other intercommunal traditions have demonstrated, there is no mutual exclusivity between the modern and the communitarian.

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<sup>91</sup> Rustom Barucha, *In the Name of the Secular: Contemporary Cultural Activism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.83.

<sup>92</sup> Rashmi Varma, 'Provincialising the Global City: From Bombay to Mumbai', *Social Text* 81, Winter 2004, p.83.

The final chapter will return to Britain to evaluate the relevance of Bhikhu Parekh's multiculturalism for the recovery of secular civil society, distinguishing between its complicity with liberalism and state policies of minority management and its sensitivity to the complexities of attachment, cultural belonging.

## **Reclaiming Multiculturalism: From ‘the Politics of Piety’ to the Politics of the Secular**

- In its lack of critical spirit, today’s multiculturalism is the antithesis of what once could more rightly have claimed the name. The possibility of gaining a critical vantage on one’s own society by learning about an alien one (...) is almost entirely foreclosed by its complacent cult of difference. Gopal Balakrishnan, ‘The Politics of Piety’ (2001)
- In short, Britain is a community of communities, a community with a collective sense of identity most certainly, but also including within it many communities with a more or less developed sense of their own identity. Bhikhu Parekh, ‘The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Reporting on a Report’ (2001)

When the Commission on the Future of Multiethnic Britain published its Report in October 2000, it didn’t exactly receive a national standing ovation. It was publicly shredded on release, despite appreciative noises before its publication. That some of the criticism was founded on misrepresentation (the report at no point stated that the term Britain had ‘racist’ connotations) barely tempered an unforgiving reception. It also had divisive consequences for the race relations industry itself. Raj Chandran of

the Campaign For Race Equality derided the report as a sad indictment of 'politically correct politicians and public figures [who] have a masochistic urge to flagellate themselves, and a sadistic nation to insult their fellow countrymen and women'.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines the politics of the theory behind the Commission's Report, published in the same year by its chair Bhikhu Parekh in his work *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000).<sup>2</sup> I begin by outlining the main strands of criticism of the text before debunking liberal opposition to multiculturalist implications and outlining some of the real failures of multiculturalism as policy. The remaining section of the essay looks to multiculturalism as possibility by arguing that it needs to be critically rescued from its conservative moorings in the service of more worldly appropriations of antiracism by ethnic minority citizens.

Criticism of *The Report on the Future of Multi Ethnic Britain* (2000),<sup>3</sup> commissioned by the Runnymede Trust, has, as suggested earlier, been barbed and pointed. Predictable hostility from usual suspects on the Right and the guardians of Middle England was compounded by the government's initial unwillingness to recognise its authority, preferring to insist on its unofficial standing. Parekh himself believes the *Report* suffered by following so quickly on the heels of the Macpherson report since, by sharing its 'vocabulary' and 'assumptions', it became an 'obvious proxy target' for conservatives who, having to bend over to Macpherson out of

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<sup>1</sup> Raj Chandran, 'An insult to all our country', *Daily Mail*, 11 October 2000, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000). Henceforth referred to as *Multiculturalism*.

<sup>3</sup> The Runnymede Trust Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (London: Profile, 2000) Henceforth referred to as *Report*.



political sensitivity, were eager to lynch a 'black manifesto' without such immunity.<sup>4</sup>

For all the media outrage at the *Report*, much of that criticism was carried out at a relatively low level of abstraction. Since *Multiculturalism* has been credited as the Report's silent partner by theoretically underwriting most of the latter's recommendations, then questions have to be asked of how radical the underlying principles really are. If Parekh really was the commission's puppet master, and his refusal of authorial personality is disingenuous,<sup>5</sup> then it's vital that *Multiculturalism's* criticisms are either validated or systemically debunked.<sup>6</sup> Although the race relations industry may now want to put clear water between itself and the *Report*, in the absence of an alternative, it stands alone as an authoritative consensus on a programme for racial justice and a multicultural imaginary.

Because of its relatively high level of abstraction, *Multiculturalism* was subjected to less rabid hostility than the *Report* but was still assailed from a battery of positions on the Left and the Right. Criticism was focussed around interrelated and contingent areas. These ranged from the closeted portrait of cultural community, the espousal of communal 'duty', the imbalance of intra-group equality and the surreptitious validation of piety to the reckless discrediting of liberalism and anti-discrimination. If some criticisms were qualifications of an otherwise welcomed intervention in the field, others drew long question marks over its political sense.

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<sup>4</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Reporting on a Report, *The Round Table* 362 (2001) pp 679-80.

<sup>5</sup> 'The report is entirely their creation, and I only hope that the understandable but regrettable tendency to identify a report with a commission's chair will be studiously resisted.' Bhikhu Parekh, preface to *Report*.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Barry, 'The Muddles of Multiculturalism,' *New Left Review* 8 (2001).p.49.

In this opening section of the essay I will arrange these criticisms in 'ascending order' presenting an overview of commonplace questions of the work and concluding with those who put the most critical distance between themselves and the text. This will provide the argumentative frame within which I make a comprehensive counter-thesis accommodating valid criticism of the text with the defensible aspects of Parekh's argument to suggest a role for multiculturalism as the pedagogical compass for human rights culture.

The boiling point of liberal opinion on *Multiculturalism* is its perceived emphasis on the legal personality of communities at the expense of individual rights. Pluralized public ethics, with its tacit approval of in-group values, carry such a threat. Of all liberal principles, it is equality that is most conspicuously counterpoised to difference. And it is equality that many of the critics believe is imperilled by recognition of difference. Seyla Benhabib (1996) captures the spirit of this disquiet as the uneasy trade off between 'internal freedoms and external protections'.<sup>7</sup> Since diversity within community is 'far less tolerated than diversity within nations', Parekh's allegedly laissez-faire attitude to the illiberalisms of intra group relations has been considered by some to stray too far from the liberal line 'Feminist' multiculturalists such as Gurpreet Mahajan and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown have been among those to express disquiet about the privileging of cultural recognition above individual sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> Benhabib takes the bottom line to be that

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<sup>7</sup> Seyla Benhabib, ' "Nous" Et "Les Autres": The Politics of Complex Cultural Dialogue in a Global Civilisation,' *Multicultural Questions*, ed. Christian Joppe & Steven Lukes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.57.

<sup>8</sup> 'Multiculturalists need to ensure that measures introduced for the purpose of enhancing equality between groups do not become a means of sustaining structures of inequality within the community. This may be possible only when multiculturalism disassociates special rights granted for countering systematic discrimination from rights that may be necessary for preserving minority cultures.

‘if our goal is the preservation of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity for its own sake, we risk sacrificing moral autonomy to aesthetic plurality’.<sup>9</sup>

It should come as little surprise to those familiar with Parekh’s affiliation with Indian anti-secularism that most multiculturalist dissent stemmed from his talk of the dutiful communitarian citizen. What was most discomfiting for many nominally multiculturalist critics was a perceived exaggeration of the closed character of cultural boundaries, and the individual’s ‘duty’ to police its borders. While Bernard Yack (2001) takes exception with the call of loyalty to the ancestral culture rather than concern for the cultural community, citing Parekh’s invocation of our duty ‘to preserve and pass on to succeeding generations what they think valuable in it’, Alibhai- Brown (2000) is troubled about the fixity Parekh attributes to cultural community itself.<sup>10</sup> She believes Parekh’s vision of ‘a community of communities’ flirts perilously with communal involution, culminating with a sense of culture as whole, integrated and beyond reproach. She remonstrates that ‘we may not all be fundamentalist liberal individuals, but that does not mean that we all belong to a community’.<sup>11</sup> Behhabib (2001) likewise suggests that to arrive at Parekh’s communitarian multiculturalism we have to ‘homogenise’ and ‘flatten out’ the

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Preservation of cultural practices can be, and often is, an excuse to continue with customs that perpetuate discrimination of some groups within the community, special rights cannot be justified for this end.’ Gurpreet Mahajan, ‘Rethinking Multiculturalism’, *Seminar* 484 (1999), p.61.

<sup>9</sup> Behabib, *ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Yack, ‘Multiculturalists and Political Theorists,’ *European Journal of Political Theory* 1.1 (2001), Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, ‘Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory [Review],’ *Political quarterly* 72.3 (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Alibhai-Brown also claims this to be a feature of the Runnymede report, raising the question of whether there was unanimous support for its political/theoretically moorings, and whether, despite a 23-man commission, any resistance to lord Parekh’s viewpoint prevailed. Alibhai-Brown, p.391.

contradictions and struggles, and ignore 'the interpretative strands and contestations which constitute culture'.<sup>12</sup>

These critiques have emboldened those who maintain the incompatibility of liberalism with multiculturalism.<sup>13</sup> For others, Parekh's multiculturalism teeters on the brink of being 'simply too communitarian'. They contend that *Multiculturalism* founders on contradictions between an ostensibly relativist, communitarian approach and a commitment to egalitarianism. Kelly (1999) avers that this relativism assumes that societies are all as tolerant of difference as ideal liberal democracies are, leaving unaddressed 'the unequal and unjust power relationships which exist within it.'<sup>14</sup> Since Parekh 'rejects the possibility of an appeal to universal principles or norms as a way of reconciling or arbitrating between cultural groups', 'moral and political issues can only be addressed from the internal perspective of a moral and political tradition'.<sup>15</sup> Yack wonders whether this is the point at which liberals should 'abandon' Parekh's multiculturalism.<sup>16</sup>

This invites the conclusion that a politics of recognition can never be a comprehensive resolution to the disadvantages suffered by minority groups.

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<sup>12</sup> Benhabib, p.57.

<sup>13</sup> 'To say that Britain is 'both a liberal and a plural society' is to invoke the theoretical basis underlying societal rights for groups. Pluralism, interpreted in this way, cannot simply be added to liberalism but is fundamentally in conflict with, as Parekh himself emphasises in *Rethinking Multiculturalism*.' Barry, p.104.

<sup>14</sup> 'What about the shared forms of life of those societies which are less tolerant of difference than an ideal liberal democracy, precisely those forms and practices which are the subject of the Parekh report?' Paul Kelly, 'Identity, Equality and Power: Tensions in Parekh's Political Theory of Multiculturalism,' *Multiculturalism, Identity and Rights*, (ed). Bruce Haddock & Peter Sutch (London: Routledge, 2003)., p.104.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Yack, p.112.



Multiculturalism can only transform a 'whole gamut of inequalities into mere demands for tolerance, of difference.'<sup>17</sup>

One of the more cogent liberal critiques of multiculturalism, and Parekh's rendering of it in particular, is Brian Barry's, in *Culture and Equality* (2001) and *The Muddles of Multiculturalism* (2001). Barry contends that Parekh's multiculturalism undermines measures for anti-discrimination. It does so, he ventures, because by scape-goating the liberal establishment as the cradle of cultural intolerance it weakens the foundations on which anti-discrimination are built. Secondly, because he contends that the misrepresented strengths of *Report* were its stresses on non-discrimination (and what he terms its 'corollary,' the 'need to overcome misconceptions and prejudices')<sup>18</sup> their most commendable recommendations do not involve any 'breach of basic liberal principles', and he dismisses anything resembling a departure from those principles.

Barry's resolution is to take refuge in the protection of liberalism, which he defends from Parekh's assault on its cultural bias by defining it as a principle of fair treatment and equal opportunity rather than neutrality. He claims liberalism has been far more successful in removing the punitive disadvantages of ethnic minorities through the principle of equal treatment and anti-discrimination. He asserts that the problems thrown up by the uniform exercise of liberal law has been 'relatively few'. He concludes that 'western liberal societies may be the only ones in which it has

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<sup>17</sup>Gopal Balakrishnan, 'The Politics of Piety,' *New Left Review* 7 (2001). p.159.

<sup>18</sup> Barry, p.52.



ever been widely believed that there is anything wrong in treating outsiders less well than the already established population.’<sup>19</sup>

Barry goes further still to claim that the only worthwhile suggestions made in the *Report* require nothing more than a consistent, sustained application of the principle of non-discrimination, thus discrediting the entire fabric of Parekh’s ‘alter-liberal’ bias in *Multiculturalism*. The substantive recommendations of the report are distilled to the ‘corollary of anti-discrimination: the need to overcome misconceptions and prejudices’. In effect, he arrogates absolute judicial merit to liberalism alone.<sup>20</sup>

Barry sees the report at its weakest when it strays outside liberal boundaries. Not only is the *Report* (itself) liable to be harmful to the vulnerable and deviant in ‘minority’ communities, but its position on ‘basic issues in political theory’ compromise its most meritorious aspects – its emphasis on the need for more and better anti-discrimination measures’.<sup>21</sup>

While Barry endorses anti-discrimination because it is amenable to legal remedy, other suggestions threaten to unravel the entire edifice of the liberal order. Positive discrimination advocated by the *Report* as the best means to overcome attitudes that beget prejudice rests on a ‘different normative basis’; do not lend themselves to ‘legal enforcement or ‘have precise implications in terms of numbers.’<sup>22</sup> Since making the media or police sufficiently responsive to what he obliquely calls ‘Asian

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<sup>19</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001)p.284.

<sup>20</sup> ‘This is simply a necessary condition of implementing the principle of non-discrimination, and does not in any way conflict with the principle of non-discrimination, or with the liberal principle of equal treatment that underlies anti-discrimination measures. Some of these ideas are better than others – but they do not involve any breach of basic liberal principles. They are largely addressed to the corollary of anti-discrimination: the need to overcome misconceptions and prejudices.’

Barry, Muddles, p.51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.,p.54.

and black sensibilities' does not fall under the general remit of anti-discrimination, it represents not only a distraction but more worryingly a subtraction from a progressive liberal agenda.

Barry is happy to commend anti racism as long as it derives from the good stock of liberal values. Since non-discrimination is such a principle, he welcomes its promotion. But where multiculturalism expresses a will to pluralize the public culture, making it responsive to and reflective of a diverse population, its divergence from liberalism discredits its worthiness as a Leftist project.

Barry's suspicion of multiculturalism rehearses well-worn liberal apprehensions of the rights of vulnerable individual in non-liberal cultures. The danger of multiculturalism (of pluralizing the public culture) is to allow reactionary cultural minorities, under the patronage of diversity, to mistreat women and children with impunity:

'One is that the line taken by the Report is liable to be harmful to women and children in minority communities and to those within them who deviate from their prevailing norms. The other is that the Report's position on basic issues in political theory weaken its most valuable aspect – its emphasis on the need for more and better anti-discrimination measures.'<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.58.

I propose that the critical distance many liberals attempt to place between themselves and the communitarian aspects of multiculturalism is based on a one-dimensional apprehension of liberalism as a set of abstract principles rather than lived culture. In other words, the essentialism of the liberal critique of multiculturalism can only be sustained in academic discourse. Parekh's, like all mainstream multiculturalisms, is fundamentally a conservative theory that is ethically harmonious with liberalism.

In fact, it is multiculturalism's very implication with liberal strategies that is the cause of antiracist scepticism. Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition, in the mild doses advocated by thinkers such as Parekh, are perfectly compatible with the aspirations of the liberal establishment; that's precisely why it has become the British state's staple antiracist policy since the Jenkins era.

A politics pivoted around cultural or racial difference carries little destabilising threat to the social order or promise of antiracist amelioration. As I will argue later, multiculturalism as policy has limited the emergence of secular citizen-actors from ethnic minorities, stymied their cultivation of political literacy and effectively constrained the possibilities of self-determined anti-racism.

Barry's conclusion that the hope of *Multiculturalism and Report* is for a 'community of communities', strips Parekh's vision of all its subtlety in blending collective with individual rights. As both repeatedly stress, the evolution of British public culture rests on a conception of the nation as both a community of citizens and a community of communities.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Report*, p.3.

Barry is therefore disingenuous when he polarises multiculturalism from liberalism. The two are not mutually exclusive or politically incompatible. If there is a core message in *Multiculturalism*, it is that the principle of multiculturalism can and should coexist with liberalism. There is no necessary antagonism between the two; they are complementary to each other. The following excerpt explicitly sets out how Parekh imagines their coexistence:

The dialogically constituted multicultural society both retains the truth of liberalism and goes beyond it. It is committed to both liberalism and multiculturalism, privileges neither, and moderates the logic of one by that of the other. It neither confines multiculturalism within the limits set by liberalism and suppresses or marginalizes non-liberal values and cultures, nor confines liberalism within the limits of multiculturalism and emasculates its critical and emancipatory thrust.<sup>25</sup>

There is also an obvious (and convenient) confluence between liberal principles of non-discrimination and multiculturalist imperatives that has been realised in equal opportunities policies. In the wake of big judicial reviews such as Scarman and Macpherson, audits have been commissioned by corporations to assess the visibility of ethnic minorities among their workforce. The same was done in key areas of the public sector, famously in the police force but also in teaching and broadcasting. The resulting policy has been targets for the inclusion of ethnic minorities as evidence of cultural diversity: ethnic head counts have become the barometers of racial

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<sup>25</sup> Parekh, p.340.

tolerance. The idea is a simple one; by changing the person, the prejudice is also expelled. When racism is conceived as an attitude or a state of mind this is a prescription that makes perfect sense.

So even though multiculturalism has spectacularly fallen from favour at the political centre it is crucial not to overplay the ideological incompatibility between the two in practice. After all, liberal and multiculturalist policies have co-existed for the past thirty years and Parekh for one is too savvy to pretend that liberalism can be dispensed with entirely or that multiculturalism is an autonomous political doctrine. Parekh readily admits that the operations of multiculturalism, at least in the British context, are reliant on a liberal infrastructure. Parekh's multiculturalism can never really go 'beyond liberalism' because it is premised on existing liberal culture and practices. Multiculturalism and liberalism are deeply implicated in each other despite their superficial and constructed differences.

Parekh does not disavow liberal values themselves but contests the presumption of liberal superiority above other 'operative public values'. What multiculturalism seeks to debunk is liberal exceptionalism, not liberal values themselves. Parekh insists that liberalism needs to retain its 'critical thrust', and not be 'emasculated' since it is so deeply embedded (and indeed any society which has evolved a liberal tradition) in the 'operative public values' of Western societies. Nonetheless, and for its own good, he recommends its provincialisation. Instead of an uncritical genuflection to its superiority it should instead be modified, supplemented and (to borrow Charles Taylor's phraseology) 'fused with other cultural horizons'. Just as any cultural viewpoint is dangerous when universalised, liberalism needs to be



tempered with an alterior standpoint from which to moderate its excesses and imagine 'alternatives'. He argues that since we are culturally embedded and prone to worlding our own values, we need intercultural dialogue to counter this tendency and help us rise to the required level of intellectual abstraction.<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein, others have rightly contested multiculturalism's autonomy from its liberal spine and are therefore dismissive of Parekh's aggrandizing claim for multiculturalism as a 'fully-grown' ideology. Miller (2001) is one of those who are skeptical that Parekh's multiculturalism can walk without liberal crutches. He suggests, citing Parekh's discussion of Chinese human rights violations, that while Parekh is quick to expose the 'liberal bias' of the UN declaration of human rights, he takes absolute recourse to that discourse in condemning China for perpetrating atrocious acts against human dignity. Miller concludes that intercultural dialogue can 'only proceed against the background of substantial agreements on basic questions of justice.'<sup>27</sup> Yack similarly reasons that the 'spirit of goodwill and compromise' that Parekh demands as a prerequisite for constructive intercultural communication rest on 'settled principles of justice'<sup>28</sup>. It is with this in mind that he feels Parekh's exalted multiculturalism demands too much of a relatively limited set of ideals and institutions. Though it might very well offer acceptable means to resist cultural homogenization and preserve cultural diversity, 'transformed into a new grand theory of political society, with its own view of human nature, theory of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.128.

<sup>27</sup> D. Miller. 'Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory [Review].'  
*American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3 (2001), p.716.

<sup>28</sup> Barry (2001) makes a similar point in relations to non-liberal societies when he says that 'Without free speech and competitive politics [liberal values] (neither of which is required by universal values, according to Parekh) any government's claim that there is a 'consensus' for illiberal policies is improvable and inherently suspect.' Barry, *Muddles*, p.62.

justice, and so forth, multiculturalism tends to decay into a form of pious and wishful thinking.’<sup>29</sup> These objections are magnified in Gopal Balakrishnan’s (2001) seething disownment of multiculturalism. His denunciation stems from his reading of it as a ‘stealth liberalism capable of integrating variously devout immigrants into unevenly secular European societies’:

Multiculturalism is simply an ideology of affirmative action, incapable of imagining what it would take to achieve real social equality. The multiculturalist scheme transforms a whole gamut of inequalities into mere demands for tolerance of difference (...) Its treacly pieties are incompatible with any polemical élan against the established order.<sup>30</sup>

Because he interprets Parekh’s definition of communal cultures as a fusion of ‘ethnicity and religion’, he understands multiculturalism’s objective as one to smuggle religiosity through western society’s back door. Since he sees multiculturalism as a warped hybrid of liberalism and religion, each as counter revolutionary as the other, it must be anathema to the Left. Its proximity to liberalism compromises its radicalism while its fraternity with religion betrays its reactionary moorings.

He aligns himself with Fraser (1998) when he points to multiculturalism’s moral stress on ‘difference’ as counter revolutionary and ethically incompatible with the socialist ideal. Both surmise that the transformation of the deep structures of

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<sup>29</sup> Balakrishnan, p.159.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.159.

political economy and culture require dissolution of group differences. It is on the basis of this reasoning that Fraser advocates a political combination of socialism and deconstruction.<sup>31</sup> Liberal welfarism and mainstream multiculturalism are 'analogous' affirmative strategies to injustice: making surface corrections to inequitable social outcomes without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them.<sup>32</sup>

As I will argue later in this chapter, while both Balakrishnan and Fraser are correct to question the transformative (and therefore antiracist) scope of multiculturalism there is a characteristically academic disdain in their critiques for cultural environments and their influence on political literacy and engagement. The transformation of both demands radical social restructuring that cannot be achieved through the limitations of liberal democracy. Since Balakrishnan (in particular) is interested in overthrowing the bourgeois institutions and values of liberal democracy, he cannot recognize the possibilities inherent in self-determined antiracism through secular citizenship. Both regard religious or cultural community and identity at worst as something to be 'put out of business', at best as 'false consciousness', but conclusively unworthy of being sensitively accommodated to the matrix of human rights culture.

The diminution of cultural or religious community as expendable in the struggle for social equality both obscures its environmental role in shaping attitudes and modes of political engagement and renders invisible the naturalisation of liberalism

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<sup>31</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist Age"', in Cynthia Willett (ed), *Theorizing Multiculturalism: A Guide to the Current Debate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) p.41.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.31.

as the only political idiom through which antiracism and human rights can be apprehended or acted.

Parekh uses this naturalisation to explain Barry's blind conviction in the righteousness of secular liberalism despite its reverberation around the history of colonialism. There is a unerring parallel between Parekh's challenge for a critical engagement with the life and times of liberalism, its role in the rationalisation of colonialism, and Gayatri Spivak's call to retain vigilant to 'the face of the foreclosure' which haunts the rationalist tradition (Hegel and Kant in particular).<sup>33</sup> Using liberalism as the yardstick for intercultural evaluation therefore obscures its own cultural location and historical situation. It can never be impartial or be considered as an 'Archimedean' standpoint:

This is as true of liberalism as any other political doctrine. Liberalism is a substantive doctrine advocating a specific view of man, and the world and embedded in and giving rise to a distinct way of life. As such it represents a particular cultural perspective and cannot provide a broad and impartial enough framework to conceptualise other cultures or their relations within it.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> 'This is not to maintain the absurd view that liberalism was nothing more than an ideological justification of colonialism, but rather that it did not develop in a historical vacuum and that its theoretical content and self-understanding cannot be fully comprehended without taking account of its complex relationship with the colonial experience and its subjugated 'other'. Parekh, p.34. This point animates much of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.14.

An overview of liberal theories of cultural diversity would bring into relief a failure of imagination. They are ensnared, in Parekh's opinion, in the conceptual prison of bourgeois liberalism. They conceive of culture as passive, of non-liberal societies as unable to fulfil the good life, and liberal values as universal. This residual colonial superiority haunts political theory and its mandate for justice in a multicultural society. It fails to grasp the benefits of cultural diversity for society as a whole. It fails to recognise that societies are constituted both as communities of communities and communities as individuals. Advancing the debate to meet the needs of our multicultural societies, he argues, involves the 'need to go further and make a positive case for cultural diversity, showing how and why it is worth cherishing, and that it benefits not just minorities but society as a whole'.<sup>35</sup>

By not recognising the legitimacy of alternative cultural values, liberal societies have a higher propensity for illiberalism because they absolutise their own values. Further, it invests liberals with the arrogance to presume that all who refuse to share their values 'are victims of false consciousness'.<sup>36</sup> The merits of liberal society are precisely its tolerance and inclusivity, not an authoritarian will to autonomy, individualism and self-creation. To play up the latter aspects of liberalism at the expense of the former is to misrepresent liberalism's inner logic and strength.<sup>37</sup>

Multiculturalism pivots around a concern to adapt societal personalities to reflect the shifting, multivalent adaptations in society that occur with patterns of migration and processes of globalisation. Since each society carries with it its own sense of morality and prioritises some values above others, its societal personality needs to be

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p.98.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.113.



malleable enough to cope with the demands placed on it (without losing its distinctive character). An anachronistic societal personality alienates those with different worldviews from civil institutions and consequently from the political process.

Without a broadened and pluralized conception of human and societal nature, able to accommodate the non-liberal figure of the community into the public personality, liberalism will continue to project a social horizon fashioned in the image of colonial Britain. It will continue, in short, to make the bourgeois white male the subject of justice and the bearer of rights. It will be a poor servant to those individuals who wish to participate in secular ways that are beyond the scope of liberal institutions and imaginaries. The universalisation of liberalism as a political language and the concomitant naturalisation of its cultural dimensions limit the participation of minorities from active citizenship, thereby inadvertently sustaining social segregation between cultural communities.

Fraser's stated contradiction between ethnic or racial identities and transformation implies that any resistance conducted on the basis of that identity is counter intuitive to social justice and therefore devoid of any 'significant' virtue even if it might achieve 'surface' gains.<sup>38</sup> But the victories of politically disenfranchised groups—such as in single issue campaigns against prejudiced policing or inadequate housing—constitute more than affirmative victories. As Young (1998) counter argues, most of these struggles self-consciously involve issues of 'cultural recognition and economic

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<sup>38</sup> Fraser, pp.31-3.

deprivation' but do not constitute these as 'totalising ends'.<sup>39</sup> Cultural identity is often asserted as the only means to secular justice. As she goes on to suggest, anti-racist, feminist and anti-gay movements, herded together under the rubric of 'identity politics', are better understood as conceiving of recognition as a means to socio-economic justice.<sup>40</sup>

Cultural minorities coalesce into communities because others in their community have suffered the same hardships as they are confronted with. Furthermore, inequalities and inequities are not arbitrarily diffused through society. Barry may be right to guard against assigning all disadvantages to ethnic origin, but racism, xenophobia, Islamaphobia and other forms of bigotry remain determinate factors of economic and social injustice. 'Denizens of the same ghetto' have little consolation but their own fraternity and little goodwill but from those who, having suffered with them, are enjoined to fight with them. Communities in struggle against human violations are, in the words of Upendra Baxi (2002), 'the primary authors of human rights.'<sup>41</sup> The banal sociological opposition between 'identification with' and 'identification to' often become coagulated in the scene of discrimination. In racialised environments, community is defined as much by shared struggle as by received cultural identity. Fraser seems to forget that ethnic minorities have had to organise separately – to become communities - in response to their experiences of

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<sup>39</sup>Iris Marion Young, 'Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser's Dual Systems Theory', in Cythia Willett (ed) *Theorizing Multiculturalism: A Guide to the Current Debate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) p.65.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>41</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.89.

racism, exclusion and discrimination.<sup>42</sup> The logic of domination, through stigmatisation and demonisation, dictates that people come to think of themselves and other in terms of identity experiences, which they hold in community and which alienate other identities at the moment of experience. The communitarian identity assumed for the historical moment is that of a 'minority community'.<sup>43</sup> They effectively become the 'resistance identities' that Castells (1997) writes about as compelled antithesis of domination power. Here is Neera Chandhoke (1999) on how resistance identities emerge from majoritarian acts of demonisation and stigmatisation:

The project of building resistance identities seeks to simultaneously accomplish two things. It firstly attempts to revalue the (formerly) stigmatised identity. Secondly, it endeavours to change the power equation in society (...) This process will simultaneously differentiate the members of the aforesaid community from other communities despite many commonalities that may create bonds of solidarity, as well as subsume differences within the community.<sup>44</sup>

Parekh has this to say on the subject of cultural community, which he defines as 'a body of people united in terms of a shared culture'.<sup>45</sup> Cultural communities

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<sup>42</sup> Kalbir Shukra, Les Back, Michael Keith, Azra Khan and John Solomos, 'Race, Social Cohesion and the Changing Politics of Citizenship' *London Review of Education*, Vol. 2, No. 3, November 2004, p.190.

<sup>43</sup> Neera Chandhoke, *Beyond Secularism: The Rights of Religious Minorities* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.31.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>45</sup> Parekh. p.154.

unsurprisingly possess two qualities, cultural and communal. Its culture forms its 'content' while the group of people who share its culture comprise its communal basis. While these are obviously interdependent dimensions, they are also mutually exclusive. It is possible to retain aspects of culture while being estranged from the overarching community as in the case of economic migrants and refugees. It can also cut the other way when individuals dissent or renounce cultural values but remain communally bound because they are 'deeply attached' to the community, or as likely, economically and socially dependent on it.<sup>46</sup>

While cultural communities might not be determining or constitutive of human personality, Parekh is not shy of suggesting that they are the *principal* factor in human beings' social evolution. Individuals' behavioural characteristics and inclinations arise almost in imitation of others in their immediate cultural community. The preferences and prejudice of the cultural community become deeply impressed on its younger members. It's worth quoting from an extended section where Parekh elaborates on the depth and breadth of these impressions:

To be born and raised into a cultural community is to be deeply influenced by both its cultural content and communal basis. Human beings are born with a cluster of species-derived capacities and tendencies and are gradually transformed by their culture into rational and moral persons. Culture catches them at a highly impressionable and pliant stage and structures their personality. They learn to see the world in a particular way to individuate and assign certain meanings and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

significance to human activities and relationships, and to conduct the latter according to certain norms. They also acquire certain particular habits of thought and feelings, traits of temperament, inhibitions, taboos, prejudices, and musical, culinary, sartorial, artistic and other tastes (...) Since all these are often acquired unconsciously and in the course of living within a more or less integrated way of life, they strike deep roots and become an inseparable part of their personality.<sup>47</sup>

Parekh is insistent that the way that cultural communities frame human existence from the cradle to the grave make them a qualitatively different experience from voluntary forms of association. They are neither 'instrumental' nor dispensable when they satisfy extrinsic interests. As 'historical communities' sustained by 'long collective memories of struggles and achievements and well-established traditions of behaviour' they are also not ephemeral creations.<sup>48</sup> They imbue their members with 'a sense of rootedness, existential stability and the feeling of belonging to an ongoing community of ancient and misty origins'.<sup>49</sup>

Our participation and identification with cultural community are therefore 'an inheritance' which is not elective even if we may choose to later negotiate their influence. As an inheritance it leaves a social mark on us which exhausts our own identification with it and which also pre-empts our entire disassociation from it. Parekh's argument here echoes my own that social realities of discrimination and

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.156.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



demonisation are coercive influences on the formation and retention of community, which maybe cultural or otherwise.

But it is precisely this worldly sense of community as experiential and externally constituted that is also a stumbling block for Parekh's privileging of cultural over secular differences. Though he is rightfully scathing of the liberal tendency to reduce cultural communities to voluntary associations I believe he over-determines and overplays the inherited characteristics of cultural community relative to its participatory and experiential dimensions.

Despite the many qualifications he makes to insist on the negotiable nature of this inheritance his insistence remains a begged question. Why is Parekh at such pains to defend cultural community (as 'historical' community) above all others? The politics of his emphasis on inherited culture is a matter of speculation that we don't have space to discuss here, although other critics have offered up plausible suggestions.<sup>50</sup>

After all, it not as though cultural communities are on the verge of social extinction or even in decline. Religious and ethnic associations dominate British civil society and are the principle forums through which ethnic minority politics (in particular) are convened. The forms of association which have perversely become scarce as cultural communities flourish are those communities 'of resistance' which transcend sectarian identities for common secular goals.

The privilege Parekh affords inherited cultural identities marginalizes emergent secular identities in his imaginary of Britain as a 'community of communities'.

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<sup>50</sup> Gopal Balakrishnan for example, has explained it as commensurate with Parekh's ambition of 'integrating variously devout immigrants into unevenly secular European communities', reading it as indicative of Parekh's bias towards 'traditional cultures', which by implication are religious. Balakrishnan, p.158.

These emergent secular identities derive from inhabitations of minority that have social rather than cultural origins. As I have indicated earlier, I'm not discounting the possibility that affirmations of racial or cultural difference can be orientated towards secular aspirations, but simply that for the purposes of encouraging political interventions, it makes no sense to privilege cultural over social differences. I'm talking here about identities and communities that are forged in struggle and experiences of common deprivation and violation. Examples might be communal identities such as the embattled estate Broadwater Farm in the 1980s or more recent communitarian projects such as Islington's Coombe House Initiative, founded in outrage at decades of neglect from administrators and local authorities.<sup>51</sup>

But I'm also referring to those communities of affinity that mobilised for justice for the murders of Stephen Lawrence and Ricky Reel, the wrongful imprisonment of Satpal Ram and the death in prison of Zahid Mubarek. These are participatory, experiential and secular communities. They are communities that resist facile categorisation as voluntary associations even though their contributions to political culture might outlast their communal basis. These are the novel kinds of 'resistance identities' that Castells principally relates to collective victims of racialisation and demonisation, but which differentiate their members from perhaps more orthodox 'inherited' cultural communities by creating bonds of experiential solidarity.

It is also the case that these are not disposable communitarian identities that can be casually discarded once they have outlasted their usefulness. Individuals' participation and identification with these communities have deep influences on how

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<sup>51</sup> For more information on the Coombe House Initiative see the website of its umbrella organisation The Co-ordinated Housing Initiative at <<http://www.tchi.org.uk>>.

they understand themselves and the society around them. Unlike cultural communities for whom a critical understanding of society can be a low priority, political consciousness underwrites the shared culture of communities of resistance.

Parekh's priority of cultural communities is also problematically sympathetic of state or liberal multiculturalism, which in the British context at least, has financially rewarded the pursuit of cultural recognition. The state has consciously incentivised the assertion of cultural difference, and so catalysed the proliferation of faith and ethnic communities.

The failure of multiculturalism as policy is therefore also the explanatory narrative of the failure of self-determined antiracism in Britain. The legacy of multiculturalism has been the formation of ethically defined fiefdoms managed by a class of community ambassadors who have arrogated representative authority to themselves. Multiculturalism has not contributed to the emergence of secular citizen-actors from ethnic minorities, but by expanding the symbolic role of ethnic and religious communities, occupied the social space in which the state could be held accountable by antiracist campaigns. Sivanandan (1990 & 1995) on the demise of a political culture:

Multiculturalism deflected the political concerns of the black community into the cultural concerns of different communities, the struggle against racism into the struggle for culture (...) In a word, cultural politics has spelt the death of a more generalised political culture and led to people fighting each other over these issues that

transgress their identities and therefore their allegiances, rather than to opposing the larger tyrannies of the state that affect them all.<sup>52</sup>

These ethnic communities have become 'parallel cultural blocs'; socially insulated and politically stagnant. The interests of community leadership are actually invested in suppressing diversity, since their state authorised power depended on the legitimacy of their control over their members.<sup>53</sup>

This protectionism suffocated the conditions under which political literacy could be developed and communities have gradually become depoliticised whether they have been upwardly or downwardly mobile. The possibilities for cross-cultural communitarian alliance on common causes such as housing, schooling or social and welfare services consequently diminished as some communities became ghettoised and others became dispersed in the suburbs. Civil society antiracist institutions – such as the local 'race committees' established in the 1970s in reaction to the far right and institutional racism – have since become moribund as the cultural literacy of the 'settled' population has taken precedence over the political literacy of its minorities.

For these reasons and more, Parekh's multiculturalism should not be simply endorsed but sceptically reconstructed in the name of self-determined antiracist politics. For one, we must remain vigilant that multiculturalism does not become

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<sup>52</sup> A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (London: Verso: 1990)p.84, and Campaign Against Racism and Fundamentalism, 'Fighting our Fundamentalisms: An Interview with A.Sivanandan', *Race & Class*, 36:3 (1995) p.74.

<sup>53</sup> Campaign Against Racism and Fundamentalism, 'Community Cohesion: Blunkett's new race doctrine', 2002, available at <<http://www.carf.demon.co.uk/feat56.html>>, accessed January 2003.

hijacked by illiberal demands for 'legislative autonomy' that might stand in for more sinister designs of impunity, or otherwise legitimise the segregating insulation of communities by self-serving leadership. For this reason, the tendency in Parekh's theorising to overstate the importance of cultural 'duty' should be challenged.

Secondly, though Parekh is convinced of the compelling nature of 'intercultural dialogue' it remains a politically empty and programmatically abstract concept. Minorities might instinctively appreciate the 'spirit of multiculturalism' as a means to impress their views in the public sphere, but it is less obvious why it should be compelling to the majority. Multiculturalism offers no incentives for hegemonic voices to compromise their power and authority beyond the platitudes of the inherent virtues of cultural diversity. Neither does Parekh specify the purpose of intercultural dialogue or how it might structure antiracist resolutions. Without a substantive constitutional programme for action, multiculturalism becomes the backdrop for peacock politics; talking shops without discernible aspirations or outcomes.

I suggest that these aspirations should be animated around a national constitution of human rights where race equality occupies a central place.<sup>54</sup> They should be acted out not just by a politically literate, liberal elite but also by ordinary citizens in a critical dialogue of political accountability in the public sphere. This new framework could promote secular citizen-actors, particularly from minority communities, to emerge out of restricted ethnic or religious environments to contribute to the achievement of aspirations such as race equality.

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<sup>54</sup> See also Robin Richardson, 'Human Rights and Racial Justice', in Audrey Ousler (ed), *Citizenship and Democracy in Schools: Diversity, Identity, Equality* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham, 2000)



What Parekh's multiculturalism alerts us to is that the apparently contradictory demands of equality and difference have not only 'outrun our existing political vocabularies' but also our existing antiracist cultures. Liberalism has neither been able to cope with cultural difference nor delivered justice for minority citizens.<sup>55</sup> This includes our existing certainties over the nature of multiculturalism. The time has come to rebuild what has been received in the name of antiracism, and it involves drawing a line between multiculturalism as policy and as possibility.

The larger significance of Parekh's 'spirit of multiculturality' to this reconstructed antiracist and human rights culture is its role in the cultivation of political consciousness, which I argue to be central to the emergence of citizen-actors capable to interrogate the state on secular grounds. While Parekh argues that democratic change can be affirmed simply through the encouragement of cultural empathy, this merely reinforces the logic of mainstream multiculturalism that has persistently isolated ethnic minorities from political engagement. Instead, multiculturalism has to be reinterpreted as a means to turn existing political wisdom inside out; moving from the personal is political to the personalisation of politics.

Nancy Fraser's partnering of deconstruction with socialism is an example of a chronic blindness to the complexities of attachment and cultural identity that typifies opposition to multiculturalism. The logic from which she deduces that deconstruction should be socialism's 'cultural analogue' reinforces the position that cultural difference has to be obliterated before formal equalities and liberties are affirmed. Deconstruction is touted as the 'deep restructuring of the relations of

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<sup>55</sup>Stuart Hall, 'The Multi-Cultural Question', in Barnor Hesse (ed), *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, 'Transruptions'* (London: Zed Books, 2001) p.232.

recognition' ever-new constructions of identity and difference are freely elaborated and then swiftly deconstructed'.<sup>56</sup> The 'transformative recognition' politics of deconstruction are comfortable with the 'transformative redistribution' politics of socialism because both 'undermine existing group differentiations.'<sup>57</sup>

But its 'utopian image', as Iris Young counters, is 'a world of political ends and objectives that is eerily empty of action'.<sup>58</sup> More than that, it is an imaginary abstracted from the lived struggles against injustice - particularly racial justice - which are acted inside deeply specific historical and cultural coordinates. They are also acted in community with others, communities which cannot be sustained without the bonds of recognition, reciprocity and connection'.<sup>59</sup> Even outwardly secular communities demand these cohesive characteristics, even if these are 'cultural' identities that are not structured through the familiar attachments of race, religion or ethnicity.

The projection of fluid identities is the kind of fantasy that can only be nurtured in academic discourse. Fraser's argument both betrays an arid imagination of socialism and a fallow apprehension of cultural difference. Bleeding cultural identity of its weight, it insidiously views it as something dissoluble (considering its dissolution a worthy ambition). Fraser is mistaken to think that we can shed our cultural identities like clothes as though our social lives are revolving wardrobes from where we can pick and choose from a shiny confection of attractive suits.

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<sup>56</sup> Fraser, p.38.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>58</sup> Young, p.65.

<sup>59</sup> Hall, p.236.

The inadequacy of philosophies of formal equalities such as Fraser's is that they only begrudgingly engage with questions of cultural difference, and then only on their own universalist terms. She is only able to analogously extrapolate racial justice from socialist strategies because difference itself is heavily subordinated to universality.

Parekh's reflections on human nature illuminate the theoretical shortcomings of universalism. He ventures that human nature and identity cannot be explained by recourse either to their universal and particular dimensions, but instead by dialectical interplay between the two. This dialectic operates in two mutually complementary ways: on one hand, that our shared human features limits the moral range of cultural values; on the other, that the sheer diversity of cultural values means that these universal features can never be identically replicated since they are culturally configured in manifold ways. He summarises:

Humans belong to a common species not directly but in a culturally mediated manner (...) their similarities and differences are both important and dialectically related. We therefore neither assimilate them to our conception of human nature and deny their particularity, nor place them in a closed world of their own and deny the universality and particularity, we acknowledge the obligation to respect both their shared humanity and cultural differences.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Parekh, p.124.

This need not translate into a relativist rejection of similarity. On the contrary, Parekh's dialectic forecloses on the very possibility of absolute difference. As human beings endowed with common characteristics and needs, we are all entitled to fundamental human rights; as culturally different beings we are entitled to have our differences considered too. Joseph Carens' (1999) counter concept of 'justice as even-handedness', argues from this premise that to treat people fairly, we must regard them concretely, with as much knowledge as we can obtain about who they are and what they care about. In answer to the preference of abstraction inherited from John Rawls' totemic *Justice as Fairness* (1971), Carens ventures that instead of trying to 'abstract from particularity', we should 'embrace' it, but in a way that ensures fairness to all different particularities.<sup>61</sup>

The particularisation of common characteristics can be extrapolated to underpin the personalisation of political activity. While human rights would shape the architecture of political accountability in the public sphere, from citizens to the state and vice versa, these principles need to be culturally grounded, historicized and personalised so that they are ethically 'owned' by social actors. In other words, there needs to be an intercultural dialogue between the abstractions of human rights and the particularities and diversities of lived experience and aspiration. The inadequacy of actually existing antiracist politics is the domination of liberal imaginaries over expressions of antiracism with corresponding limitations on the scope and spectrum of political actors. Multiculturalism as policy has perversely

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph Carens, 'Justice as 'even-handedness'', *Seminar* 484 (1999), p.49.

reinforced the liberal personality of antiracism by neglecting political diversity, while privileging cultural diversity.

Parekh proposes intercultural dialogue as a resolution to the tendency to absolutise liberal values and as a means to encourage pluralism. Its necessity arises from the rejection of secular liberalism as a standardised deliberative discourse.<sup>62</sup> Liberalism cannot be elevated above any other deliberative language because of its western provenance. In the broad forum of multiple cultural voices, each with its own unique moral and ethical perspective, all horizons are expanded and assumptions scrutinised. The 'spirit of multiculturalism' to Parekh, is conducive to open-mindedness, where the illegitimacy of 'exclusive liberalism' is faced down by a panoply of competing voices:

Since we are culturally embedded and prone to universalising our own values, we need the dialogue to counter this tendency and help us rise to the required level of intellectual abstraction.<sup>63</sup>

Without cultural diversity, the imperative for such dialogue would be lost, illustrating its benefits for society as a whole. Parekh suggests that intercultural dialogue erodes the bases of conflict since it imbues us both with a sense of empathy and a critical vantage on ourselves- a perspective of 'immanent transcendentalism'. The inhabitancy of the Other's perspective allows the transformation of our own.

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<sup>62</sup> 'All arguments are articulated and conducted in a particular language which, contra Habermas and Rawls, cannot be 'purified' or purged of its deep cultural and evocative associations either.' Parekh, p.310.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.128.



He describes the process of conversation as to be 'beyond oneself, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another'.<sup>64</sup>

Parekh contends that the willingness to empathetically inhabit alternative perspectives is a value neglected by liberal pedagogies. The faculties of 'imagination', 'sympathy' and 'sensitivity' all rank lowly in the liberal imagination but feature highly in Parekh's multiculturalist one. His programme of 'multicultural education' would be a democratising pedagogy where non-liberal values and qualities would be promoted on an equal footing with rational skills:

While rightly developing the powers of independent thought, analysis, criticism and so on, it [education] should also cultivate softer and less aggressive capacities such as sympathetic imagination the ability to get under the skin of others and feel with and for them, the willingness to look at oneself from the standpoint of others, and the capacity to listen to them with sensitivity and sympathy.<sup>65</sup>

Parekh's explanation of the escalation of tensions between the liberal establishment and the Muslim community through the Rushdie affair is transparently concerned with vindicating such an argument. Parekh contends that it was the poverty of cultural literacy on the part of both parties that exacerbated the fractiousness of the conflict and prolonged stalemate over the issue. The exchange

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Felder and Palmer, quoted in Parekh, p.337.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.227.

between liberal backlash and Muslim outrage during the Rushdie affair was rendered partially intractable because costs and rights were conceived of in peculiarly liberal terms on one side and peculiarly Islamic values on the other, since 'both groups knew little about each other's way of life and thought'.<sup>66</sup>

Without able diplomats on either side capable of articulating the infringement of one sensibility on the other, dialogue freefell from misunderstanding to hostile accusations. Without a cultivated 'bicultural literacy' reasons were apprehended within each communities' own cultural horizons and misunderstood. The true costs of each demand was misrepresented and it was this, Parekh contends, that stymied a resolution to the conflict, costing British society as a whole 'the opportunity to develop a self-understanding adequate to its multicultural character'.<sup>67</sup> He believes that a negotiated compromise could have been reached only if both parties had been sufficiently bicultural or had made a genuine effort to enter into each other's way of thinking.<sup>68</sup>

Though there are valid aspects to Parekh's autopsy of the episode, it is also partial and biased to his own multiculturalist mandate. It elides the need for secular citizenship by arguing that greater cultural knowledge could have averted the crisis. By doing so he fails to indict the politics of multiculturalism for perpetuating structural disadvantages of political literacy which left Muslims as *a community* with very few actors who could meet liberals on secular terms (especially since leadership was monopolised by traditional elites).

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.305.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Muslim demands for editorial amendments and restrictions on publications were predominantly mediated through references to religion, faith and community that were incongruous with the liberal recourse to free speech. Liberal critics of the Muslim response, such as Fay Weldon, Roy Jenkins and *The Sunday Telegraph*, were able to monopolise secular reason. The discursive hierarchies between the liberal establishment and the Muslims communities were made to stand in for wider civilisational disparities between barbaric Islam and the British mainstream, giving succour to arrogant brow beating about how best to civilise British Muslims from their book-burning barbarism to Britain's exalted democratic values.

The Bradford Muslims were politically isolated in the debate and unable to form alliances with other faith or civil society groups because their representatives were unable to reach across the cultural boundaries of their 'community' as secular citizens. Through multiculturalist policies they may have been politically 'recognised' but they were nonetheless impotent; able to mobilise as a faith community but unable to address the state on the basis of their rights. Despite their rhetorical multiculturalist construction as a community, this didn't make them 'integrated collective actors' able to exercise community rights.<sup>69</sup>

The same can and should be said of white communities in similar areas of Yorkshire and Lancashire, (strikingly evident after the summer riots of 2001)

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<sup>69</sup> Hall, p.232. A notable exception were the pressure group Women Against Fundamentalism who demonstrated democratic agency neither to endorse or defend Western liberalism or Islamic values, but used the affair to draw attention to women's issues of household inequality, prostitution and education. In the words of Homi Bhabha (1995) their intervention was one of 'reconjugating, recontextualizing, translating the event into the politics of communities and public institutions'. They are a good hybrid example of a cultural and affinity community, sharing a common historical culture but also an experiential culture born in oppression. Bhabha, 'Translator translated' , interview with WJT Mitchell, *Artforum*, March (1995) p 114.

emphasising that political illiteracy is both economically and ethnically structured, affecting minorities of all kinds. In fact, what state multiculturalism (and Parekh's multiculturalism, with its privileging of cultural community) cannot register is precisely the *emergent* cultural identities of those disadvantaged in similar ways like Bradford's white and Muslim residents, whose secular, lived experiences in neighbourhoods and estates are shared and whose struggles for better schooling or housing are common.

It is these secular identities, galvanised by common political struggles, which can, by 'activising the public sphere', democratise and enrich the cultural matrix of antiracism and political activism in general.<sup>70</sup> This in turn depends on secular issues such as antiracism being communicated in idioms comprehensible to all its constituencies. The utility of Parekh's 'spirit of multiculturalism' is to bring about the recognition of the worldliness of antiracism as a lived struggle rather than a culturally abstract principle.

What I'm suggesting is that Parekh's articulations of multiculturalism can be mobilised in the service of the social ownership of antiracism, the empowerment of politically literate citizens and the consequent enlargement of the ethnic minority political sphere. The same arguments Parekh advances to 'make a positive case for cultural diversity' are equally relevant for the advocacy of political diversity.

This apprehension of multiculturalism allows a shift in register from an unworldly emphasis on difference to an open acceptance of diversity. It is a move which at once meets the mandate of the 'deconstructive agenda', since it stresses the

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<sup>70</sup> Rustom Barucha, *In the Name of the Secular: Contemporary Cultural Activism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University: 1999) p.99.

illegitimacy of mainstream constructions of majority and minority and evacuates sense of deviation that hangs in the semantic shadow of terminology such as Fraser's of 'difference' and 'differentiation.'

Diversity speaks instead of plurality and the consequent cultural mandate to pluralize public discourse in the interest of 'deepening democracy'. Multiculturalism challenges the lazy resignation (implicit in Fraser's deconstructive proposition) that difference is predisposed to antagonism by reclaiming diversity as the enabling site of expanded opportunities for political participation. The understanding of diversity as a social good is also one of it as the advocacy of plurality and its intrinsic benefit to participatory antiracism. The 'multicultural political logic' that Stuart Hall (2001) recognises as a reforming pressure on liberal - constitutional models involves the 'expansion and radicalisation' of democratic practices in our social life' and a diversification of public sphere activity where cultural identities are not attenuated in secular activities but actively retained:

It [the process of democratic reaffirmation] must attempt to construct a diversity of new public spheres in which all the particulars will be transformed by being obliged to negotiate within a broader horizon. It is essential for this space to remain heterogeneous and pluralistic, and for the elements negotiating within it to retain their *différance*. They must resist the drive to be integrated by a process of formal equivalence, such as is inscribed



in a liberal conception of citizenship, that is to recoup an Enlightenment assimilationist strategy via a long detour.<sup>71</sup>

Hall's appeal for the diversification of the public sphere for has gradually taken shape with the proliferation of what Nancy Fraser (1996) has theorised as 'counterpublic' space. Fraser describes these as the provision of a 'parallel discursive arena', where members of 'subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.'<sup>72</sup>

Counterpublics are formed by virtue of exclusions that structurally pervade the public sphere. As the channels of expression and dissemination have been monopolised by the culturally and economically hegemonic, gendered, racialised and economic minorities have been systematically deprived of the communicative resources and opportunities to enter the public sphere. The result has been a public discourse conducted in the dominant idiom.

Accompanying the cultural diversification of society has been a consequent proliferation of counterpublic space. Early examples are those convened by women to speak back to the masculinist bent of the bourgeois liberal sphere (most strikingly successful in the promotion of US feminist interests). In the interests of legitimising the rhetoric of multicultural citizenship, the public sphere needs to be

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<sup>71</sup> Hall, pp.235-6.

<sup>72</sup>Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in Craig Calhoun (ed) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: MIT Press: 1999), p. 124.

pluralized further to invite dissent or what Fraser terms 'discursive contestation'.<sup>73</sup>

These counterpublics are thus the logical institutional outcomes of Parekh's multiculturalist programme of intercultural dialogue.

In the British case, the alternative public sphere of ethnic minority politics has been dominated by identity (faith and ethnic) based politics, thanks in the main to regimes of state multiculturalism. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s separatist ethnic movements mushroomed while multiethnic pressure group activity declined. Because of their localised and politically incoherent nature, they were unable to wield much institutional influence and are historically weak actors in campaigns against state racism.

The past fifteen years have witnessed the evolution of higher forms of ethnic minority political activity which Shukra *et al* (2004) have characterised as a 'transitional public sphere'. These social movements determinately retain 'black perspectives' ordered through 'self-organisation'.<sup>74</sup> Unlike traditional sectors of the ethnic minority political sphere, they prosecute their objectives through appeals to human rights standards and so have acquired a legitimacy that is not contingent on state patronage.

Recent entrants into the transitional public sphere, such as the National Civil Rights Movement (a title self-consciously referencing anti-apartheid and anti-colonial inspirations) are purpose built to act on legislative initiatives such as the MacPherson report and the Human Rights Act, linking the judicial system with

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Kalbir Shukra, Les Back, Azra Khan, Michael Keith and John Solomos, 'Black Politics and the Web of Joined-up Governance: compromise, ethnic minority mobilization and the transitional public sphere', *Social Movement Studies* 4:3, p.42.

‘family-led campaigns about specific cases of racial justice’.<sup>75</sup> The charter of the National Assembly Against Racism is likewise founded on a commitment to human rights in policing and asylum legislation.

The judicial awareness of actors in the transitional public sphere has also been instrumental in the molecular expansion of human rights and political literacy among organised ethnic minorities. Operation Black Vote, for instance, has initiated its own political education programmes, while the Black Racial Attacks Independent Network has counselled community organizations on how to apply the Human Rights Act in their own work.<sup>76</sup>

This is not to deny that the mismanagement of the transitional public sphere could present as many obstacles as opportunities for the radicalisation of ethnic minority politics. The vulnerability of smaller groups to alienation from wider networks potentially stifles dissent; the professionalization of senior echelons in these movements is another source of compromise; while the inclusion of state agencies such as the police forcibly moderates agendas.

The distinction I’ve drawn here between the alternative and the transitional public sphere is analogous to the broader differentiation I’ve been making between cultural and political diversity.

As commentators such as Alana Lentin (2004) have pointed out, multiculturalism’s state sanction make it an unworthy prize for antiracists, who should be concentrating efforts to reinvigorate self-determined antiracism.<sup>77</sup> The

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>77</sup> Alana Lentin, ‘Multiculturalism or Anti-Racism?’, *OpenDemocracy*, Available at <<http://www.openDemocracy.net>>. Accessed January 2005.

radicalisation of ethnic minority politics I've suggested goes fist in glove with pluralized cultural appropriations of antiracism and a negotiation of received notions of multiculturalism. Instead of using cultural diversity as an excuse to neglect the political education of the racialised, it needs to be creatively seized to empower participatory antiracism. In this imaginary civil rights and multiculturalism are not counter-intuitive, but dialectically enriching.

## CONCLUSION

My analyses of Britain and India have concluded that the constitutional and political principles of multiculturalism and secularism are in crisis in both nations. Though they have found their way in incommensurable ways, they have reached similar destinations. What I've been arguing is that the face of foreclosure for each has been constructed as the other.

This is partly because intellectuals across the political spectrum has been fixated on the abstract and theoretical dimensions of these as ethical *principles* instead of relating them back to a worldly engagement with cultural praxis. Critical politicking over multiculturalism and secularism continues to take privilege over the enactment of the multicultural and the secular. The making of a secular *culture*, the only soil on which antifascist and antiracist values can take root, has been undertheorised relative to over-determined shadow-boxing between the liberal and communitarian, where the citizen and the community square up to each other in opposite corners.

What's left is an *unproductive* crisis where arguments on both sides are configured for attrition, engineered to discredit the other as viable antiracist and antifascist strategies. These prevailing academic caricatures depict magnetic polarities between multiculturalism and secularism where each attract and repel mutually exclusive political interests. Such exclusions can only really be sustained in academic discourse (supposedly for heuristic purposes), and we have to continually



ask value these insights can have when there is such a minimal correspondence between the theoretical and the actual. The deployment of binary categories for theoretical purposes only serves to conceal and misrepresent operations of cultural praxis which are not slavishly obedient to such deadening ideological sectarianism. Our imperative has to be to disband such theoretical clusters in favour of cultivating the resources that can enrich the cultural matrix of secular struggles. We need to reclaim these concepts, rehabilitate them, and put them to work.

A stultifying, arrogant unwillingness to question liberal secularism's failure to arrest racism or galvanise antiracism accounts for one side of the stalemate. A robust secular culture does also not follow from a robust political conception of secularism. It is not only the sterility but also the *monoculturalism* of liberal secularism which conspire to impede its resonance in the public imagination. By denying the 'pluriuniversality' of social existence, liberal ideologues of secularism fail to register the disenfranchisement that occurs in the name of official secularism. As Rustom Bharucha has so persuasively demonstrated, secularism can have 'no fixed constituency'.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to abstract secularism from the cultural when it is austere, conserved in the lofty domains of high theory and state policy but not when it is conceived as lived struggles *for* the secular, which have diverse origins and produce manifold articulations.

The anodyne character of liberal imaginaries suffers by comparison with the glorious millenarianism of those peddled by the Right. The organised Left in India, paralysed by its own moribund political cultures and civil institutions, have been

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<sup>1</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *In the Name of the Secular: Contemporary Cultural Activism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.14.

agonised witnesses of the RSS' cancerous reincarnations of itself in its relentless pursuit of the transformation of civil society (to the point where it is organisationally elusive yet (paradoxically) culturally ubiquitous). Through this ideological onslaught, the Sangh Parivar has set a benchmark onto which the Left has to project its own transformative ambitions and to which it falls a long way short. This is why the interpenetration of the universal with the particular is vital to the currency of the emancipatory projects of antiracism and antifascism. Endorsing such inflections may be perceived as an invitation to adulterate the global in the distorting refractions of the local (evinced by Hindutva claims of Enlightenment thought in its own intellectual prehistory). But the urgent labour of making 'cultures of civility', as Aijaz Ahmad has forcefully pointed out, cannot take place without the unmaking of 'cultures of cruelty', a confrontation that demands displacement not withdrawal. Sumit Sarkar's fear that anti-secularist strategies to counter fascism through religiosity run the risk of sharing the 'same discursive space' as the Hindu Right risks even more by allowing them freedom to colonise dominant idioms of popular intelligibility. It also spurns the opportunity to transform a site of potential oppression into potential capital against fascism.

Having said this, the anti-secularist imagination does have obvious limitations and this becomes apparent in its stunted theoretical enunciations of community. Its religious communitarianism pervades prevailing conceptions of community - both in Britain and India - so that it has become something of a common reflex to comprehend community as little besides a reification of cultural difference.

This is partly attributable to regimes of state multiculturalism that have incentivised claims of cultural exceptionalism and actively encouraged the formation of autonomous social blocs to prove it. In India, the failures of government to meet the constitutional rights of individual citizens has similarly given rise to the assertion of cultural identities assuming the personalities of distinct social communities making aggregated political claims. Equally, Chetan Bhatt has made the point that the obverse implications of *sarva dharma sama bhava*, the operational regime of Indian secularism, involves not equidistance from all religions but also 'equiproximity to religions and promulgation of each.' In this 'vitalizing political space' the state has only been able to recognize and respect religion by apprehending it demographically, as a community of believers, which leads in turn to the actualization of social groups.<sup>2</sup>

Though these may be communities in struggles against human deprivation, there remains a patent distinction between cultural and civic community that is effaced by multiculturalist (and by extension antisectionalist) definitions that insist on a conflation between the two. If Britain's multicultural identity is as a 'community of communities' it is an identity which is far from secular and riven by sectarianism besides.<sup>3</sup> The dangers are that reified cultural communities, where the placebos of cultural *laissez faire* conspire with structural exclusions, have little concern for political education into individual rights. Deprived of opportunities to contribute to the larger good of society as *citizens*, minority individuals are perceived to be active only in consolidating the aggrandizement of territorialized communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Chetan Bhatt, 'Democracy and Hindu Nationalism', *Democratization* 11.4 (2004). p.149.

<sup>3</sup> See Arun Kundnani, 'An unholy alliance?: Racism, religion and communalism', *Race & Class* 44 (2002) pp.71-80.

These theorized and actualised group identities inhibit, even if they cannot foreclose, on citizens acting *politically* on community relations to hold state power to account. Territorialized communities have eroded the grounds on which secular coalitions of disenfranchised or disadvantaged individuals can renew the citizenship rights of its constituent members. In managing challenges to the majoritarian state, liberal multiculturalism has been very effective.

Other countervailing pressures exercised by discriminatory states and community formations compound the disarticulation of citizens not only as secular actors but more generally as human beings. These concentrations of economic, social and political power are occasionally parasitic on discourses of cultural difference to habilitate capitalism to elitist constructions of cultural essences, as Hindutva's indigenisation of neo-liberalism demonstrates. The racialisation of poverty, increasingly globalised with the coercion of national government to neo-liberal policies through the hegemonic institutions of international finance, has relegated millions to the realities of 'infra-citizenship'.

They are, however, equally reliant on discourses of human universality to justify civic restrictions. The mutations of liberalism in Britain attest to the ways in which citizenship has become racially configured, in the name of 'solidarity' and 'common interest', to debilitate the right of minority individuals to hold power accountable and to seek judicial redress. Legal instruments which were ostensibly brought into empower racial justice (such as the Human Rights Act) have been manipulated to differentially and discriminatorily impact on ethnic minorities.<sup>4</sup> Backdoor racism

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<sup>4</sup> David Faulkner, *Civil renewal, diversity and social capital in a multi-ethnic Britain* (London : Runnymede Trust, 2004.) p.9 fn.



such as this makes real the prospect of majoritarian citizenship where New Labour's vaunted rights and responsibilities culture' mean more rights for the 'settled' population but at the cost of more responsibilities for immigrants, refugees and any other group deemed to threaten the security of national identity.<sup>5</sup>

Intellectual labour needs, therefore, to be urgently invested in the task of bringing the multicultural and the secular into *productive* crisis for the higher aspirations of antiracism and antifascism.

As a rudderless ethical imperative multiculturalism has become coagulated with both anti-secularism and the un-making of secular culture. I have been arguing that we need to think multiculturalism otherwise, as a pedagogical compass with which to direct and decode secular principles. This approach yields greater dividends for the urgent cultural praxis of activating secular interventions by citizens as public actors than the observation of banal polemics between multiculturalism and antiracism.

The diversification of secular struggles against antiracism and antifascism can only be catalysed by attention to cultural and social diversity. The political meanings of these struggles can only be widened through participation, dependent upon the syncopation of the abstract to the lived. By this I mean the devolution of secular agency to a multicultural citizenry by recognising the diversity and discontinuity of lived social experience.

As I argued in the chapter on Bhikhu Parekh's multiculturalism, such agency leans heavily on his apprehension of human nature as a dialectical play of similarity

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<sup>5</sup> See David Blunkett's response to the Cattle report on 'community cohesion', cited in Les Back, Michael Keith, Azra Kahn, Kalbir Shukra, John Solomos, 'The Return of Assimilationism: Race, Multiculturalism and New Labour', *Sociological Research Online* 7:2, 2.2.



and difference but diverges in an emphasis on *social* rather than cultural difference.

Parekh founds his case for multiculturalism on what he holds to be the self-evident truth that certain forms of difference warrant greater concessions and attention than others. These are those which are 'embedded in and sustained by culture', 'a body of beliefs and practices' 'patterned and structured by virtue of being embedded in a shared and historically *inherited* system of meaning and significance'.<sup>6</sup>

Though I do acknowledge the role of inherited culture, whether religious or ethnic (what he is essentially referring to) I believe that this underprivileges the participatory dimensions of lived culture, which is as secular as it is otherwise. Secondly, cultural difference as explained by Parekh leaves itself open to reification, both internally and externally, and its ownership risks stigmatisation and exclusion by racist societies. Thirdly, his view of cultural difference gainsays possibilities for the expression of emergent *secular* energies from shared experience.

These emergent secular identities derive from inhabitations of minority that have social rather than cultural origins. This is not to dogmatically deny the possibility, as Nancy Fraser (1999) does, that affirmations of racial or cultural difference cannot be orientated towards secular aspirations, but simply that for the purposes of encouraging secular interventions, it makes no sense to privilege cultural over social differences. These emergent identities might be born in social environments as diverse in scale and activity as Mumbai's Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) or Britain's National Civil Rights Movement (NCRM), which networks the judiciary with victims of racial justice. Both transcend religious and ethnic identities in secular struggles but do so in cultural idioms appropriate and unique to their

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<sup>6</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palsgrave, 2000)pp.2-3. Emphasis mine.

shared experiences. The insistence of 'black sensibilities' in the operational culture of the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR) for instance testifies to the perseverance of cultural distinction in secular activities, while inter-community participation in religious festivals in the train of Mumbai's *mohalla* peace committees evinces the assorted expressions of the secular.

Community is especially pivotal for the renewal of citizenship and the making of human rights culture because expressions of secularity proliferate with social interdependence. It is because imaginations of community have been so persistently fixated on the religious that we have been critically negligent to the formal and informal articulations of community that populate the public sphere. If the local is a resource for self-determined forms of antiracism and antifascism, then these local formations need to be recognised as integral to the making of secular human rights culture.

This recognition must be founded on conciliation between community and human rights. This performs two interrelated roles. Firstly it reminds us that the local (the supposed precondition for community) remain the 'crucial site' for the 'enunciation', 'implementation' and 'exercise of human rights' and therefore that due attention to it presages the proliferation of human rights culture.<sup>7</sup> Human rights are above all principles of public accountability that are realised only when the local is empowered to be recognised and interrogate power.

Without a concern for the local as an enabling site for both the actualisation of human rights action and the creation of symbolic worlds onto which human rights can be 'sutured', as Gayatri Spivak has put it, interventions against human wrongs

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<sup>7</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.89.

will continue to be monopolised by those economically, geographically and historically well placed to do so.

Such monopolies will continue to arrogate human rights agency to national and international elites as long as responsibility is unambiguously translated into tutelage, into benevolence, into charity. Practically, too, the proliferation of NGOs nested within state structures, in comfortable cooperation with governments, has complicated their relationship to human rights and alienated grassroots activism. This is evident from the experience of British antiracist organisations in what Kalbir Shukra *et al* have termed the ‘transitional public sphere’, whose drive for legitimate state recognition has brought them into close proximity with state agencies, exacerbating the vulnerability of smaller groups to alienation from these wider networks, potentially stifling dissent and moderating agendas. The erasure of local identities and agencies in pursuit of admission to mainstream forums is a real and present danger to those seeking to concentrate antiracist or antifascist activism.

Secondly, it countermands the well-rehearsed complaint that human rights cannot be the basis for community, a complaint once unique to communitarians but now increasingly heard in liberal circles. Goodhart’s interventions on British citizenship typify the convergence of liberalism and communitarianism around the opposition between rights and community. His argument that universal rights are too culturally ‘thin’ to sustain mutual obligations needs to be debunked by appealing to the intuitive interpellations to responsibility by the human rights concept. As Alan Gewirth has comprehensively argued in *The Community of Rights* (1996) an affirmative synergy exists between rights and community ‘because the concept of

human rights entails a mutualist and egalitarian universality: each human must respect the rights of all the others while having his rights respected by others, so that there must be a mutual sharing of the benefits of rights and the burdens of duties'.<sup>8</sup> The problem is not that human rights and community are conceptually unbridgeable, but simply that human rights have been overlooked as the potential frame of a secular culture upon which larger constructions of community (such as the nation) could rest. The opportunities opened up by coincidences between the implementation of the Human Rights Act and curricular citizenship education in Britain as a vehicle for raising human rights literacy have been persuasively explained by Sarah Spencer, Audrey Ousler and Hugh Starkey (2000).

Just as human rights can be tools with which to fashion secular communities, they can also be standards by which to interrogate social formations which manipulate communitarian ties to further sectarian or authoritarian power against which secular struggles are mounted in the first place. Human rights universally signify the 'democratic limits' on communitarianism identified by Stuart Hall.<sup>9</sup> The diminution of rights to responsibilities, the retraction of democratic agency and refusals of accountability are all violations of those limits that can be articulated and contested by human rights.

Because of their capability to make secular and countervail authoritarian culture, human rights are an ideal basis for anti-racist citizenship. Citizenship articulated through human rights (and backed by human rights legislation) not only expands

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Gewirth, *The Community of Rights* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p.6.

<sup>9</sup> See Hall on the 'communitarian' and 'democratic' limits on multicultural and liberal alternatives to the disarticulation of participatory citizenship. Stuart Hall, 'The Multi-Cultural Question,' *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, 'Transruptions'*, ed. Barnor Hesse (London: Zed Books, 2001).



zones of personal responsibility but also the scope to act on it. The distinction between citizenship as empowerment and citizenship as integration would be one which foregrounds the substantive rather than the symbolic. Whereas citizenship as integration is concerned with aggrandising a majority and a majority culture at the expense of the minority, citizenship as empowerment is invested in meaningful devolvement of genuine agency from the national to the local.

Some radicals may worry that recourse to the apparatus of 'bourgeois' rights would be a false move for antiracism, recuperating the authority of the established order. I've argued that this scepticism towards the discourse of rights is misplaced given the belligerent renaissance of the nation-state in answer to its supposed demise.<sup>10</sup>

The return of the state to the political centre stage has become most visible since the hardening of political attitudes in the post 9/11 era, impressing only more acutely the urgency of strengthening human rights awareness in nations where the state has historically active in institutionalising prejudice. These understandable (if belated) imperatives to strengthen secular culture and citizenship have been made largely without concerted political dissension or introspection; an abundance of more finger-pointing but a paucity of navel-gazing. This has led, among other measures, to widespread support for extended detention without trial and the deportation of those who are deemed to imperil the 'national good.' David Goodhart has recently admonished the Human Rights Act and its advocates for an 'anachronistic' dislike to

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<sup>10</sup> The wariness of Daneile Arebuchi and Timothy Brennan (2001) to premature obituaries of the nation state in the *New Left Review* debates on cosmopolitanism is instructive here. See Timothy Brennan, 'Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism', *New Left Review*, 7 Jan/Feb 2001 and Daniele Archibugi, 'Cosmopolitical Democracy', *NLR* 4, July/Aug 2000.



the nation -state and endorsed the moral right of the government to revoke the claim of non-citizens to residence if there is 'enough information about someone to be convinced they are a threat but not enough to prosecute'.<sup>11</sup>

Debates about revoking the democratic rights of those who might threaten the nation are relatively embryonic here, but they resonate with a more mature discussion in India mandated by the conditions under which the nation came into being in 1947. There, the murder of Mahatma Gandhi by the RSS-inspired Nathuram Godse (and that organisation's role in fomenting communal hostility through relief work in the aftermath of partition) led to a ban on RSS activities by the inaugural Congress government. This first strategic move to curtail fascist influences preceded vexed debates about the 'divisibility' of democracy and human rights. The recent paramilitary activities of the RSS and the Bajrang Dal have even prompted intellectuals with impeccable antifascist credentials to declare that fascists do not deserve democracy. Sumanta Bannerjee, back in 1993, had argued that the Sangh Parivar does not respect democracy and that its growth will corrode India's constitutional values, such as secularism. Weighed against the preservation of democracy and the protection of innocent lives, upholding the human rights of fascists appeared to him as a negligible sacrifice.<sup>12</sup>

It's easy to trace Bannerjee's logic in Goodhart's argument; only for fascists read *jihadists* and for 'democratic space' read judicial rights. Both ask the question of why those who violate our constitutional (or, in the absence of a constitution,

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<sup>11</sup> David Goodhart, 'Liberals should beware of giving rights to people who hate us', *The Sunday Times*, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Sumanta Bannerjee, 'Sangh Parivar and Democratic Rights', *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 21, 1993.

‘national’ interests) should be democratically tolerated. Both present cases for the decision to suspend the rights of national and constitutional threats to be made by government, who should be allowed to overrule the judiciary. They tell us that we have to be undemocratic and violate the human rights of some to preserve our hard won democracies and constitutions.

But the position of cracking a few undemocratic eggs to make a democratic omelette is deeply flawed, if understandable.<sup>13</sup> When the state draws the line between terrorists and citizens, how objective can that line be? When states which have been instrumental in the institutionalisation of racist and religious prejudice are liberated from the burden of proof and allowed to waive human rights on the basis of suspicion, those who deserve democracy will most likely not be the ones who get it.<sup>14</sup>

In Britain the differential impact of criminal justice legislation has long been justified with the argument that minorities benefit disproportionately from its protection, but this conclusion is looking increasingly tenuous given the unabated criminalisation of (predominantly male) Muslim youth, succeeding that of black youth in the 1970s and 80s. These are measures that have historically discriminated against ethnic minorities.

Even well meaning legislation such as the Human Rights Act (more of a belated ratification of the European Convention than the ‘great constitutional innovation’ that Goodhart claims it to be) is riddled with discretionary loopholes, especially in

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<sup>13</sup> On a coincidental re-reading of Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (1994) I’ve realised that this paraphrases the pro-Emergency views of Dinal Dalal’s brother Nusswan. See p.457 for his variation on this theme.

<sup>14</sup> K Balagopal, ‘Democracy and the Fight against Communalism’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 7, 1993, p.58.

the politically sensitive areas of policing and immigration, with which the government executive is able to derogate from the right to liberty. Frances Webber has already warned that, 'in the field of policy, the Act could well give its imprimatur to institutional racism'.<sup>15</sup>

As majoritarianism has seeped deeper further into state institutions, (in India with the widespread communalisation of state agencies during the BJP's stint at the Centre) this shape- shifting has demanded a greater cognisance of human rights among the racialised and those who would seek to defend them. It is precisely the protection and empowerment they afford that makes them such a target for majoritarian states. People unaware of their human rights are unable to defend themselves against the threat of their revocation.

It should be evident by this point that this thesis has aspired to be very pragmatic.. My concern has not only been to relate secularism and antiracism conceptually, but theoretically and materially. In arguing for the cross-fertilisation of experience and ideas between Britain and India I have been explicitly interdisciplinary in my approach.

This interdisciplinarity has insisted from glaring oversights in discrete disciplinary approaches to antifascism and antiracism. While political philosophy such as Bhikhu Parekh's multiculturalism and theories of global citizenship requires us to bracket inequalities, its also fails to be self-reflexive about its own monologism.

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<sup>15</sup> Frances Webber, 'The Human Rights Act: A Weapon against Racism?', *Race & Class* 43.2 (2001) p.91.

Take Parekh's imperative for intercultural dialogue as an obvious example of how the abstractness of political philosophy is far removed from realities on the ground where it is intended to make a difference. Although intercultural dialogue is a natural and logical consequence of his apprehension of human nature as a play of similarity and difference, it is too heavily dependent on the autonomy of cultural from other forms of difference which structure lived existence. The willing suspension of critical disbelief demanded by Parekh's emphasis on the singularity of *cultural* diversity debilitates a pragmatic imagination of how intercultural dialogue, as antiracist capital, would operate. It is my conviction that investigations into the working or projected histories of institutional outcomes could usefully guarantee the theoretical legitimacy of political philosophy. This critical traffic between theory and grassroots politics is conspicuously absent in political ideologies of multiculturalism and secularism.

The traffic also has to flow both ways, and in this respect political theory's monologism impoverishes practice as much as it is impoverished itself. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2001) commendation of *Rethinking Multiculturalism* is made with the caveat that much of what Parekh (among others on the subject) has written is made impenetrable 'by the obscurity of learned discourse'.<sup>16</sup> This stunts their contribution to a currently shallow vocabulary with which to debate 'differences, rights and the hegemonic imperatives of the powerful'. The failure of academics to plug into the 'excitable and volatile nature of race and culture', as they break upon

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<sup>16</sup> Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, 'Rethinking multiculturalism: cultural diversity and political theory [review]' *Political quarterly*, 72:3 (2001) pp.393-4.

the social landscape, is something that could surely be corrected by greater interest in making this critical traffic more frequent.<sup>17</sup>

This brings me to directly outline the kinds of work that I envisage emerging out of this thesis. Without wanting to labour the point too much, current political conditions make imperatives to enfranchise citizens to act in the name of the secular as urgent as ever. This requires commitment from a diverse spectrum of actors and agencies in an interconnected chain of change and consequence through which secular culture is renewed and the relation between politics and culture reaffirmed.

I have already stated how foundational it is for minorities in multicultural and multi-religious societies like Britain and India to be armed with human rights consciousness and to own human rights as a condition of their citizenship regardless of how it may be racialised by the state. A secular centre will not hold without pressure from secular citizenship. As state discrimination is increasingly legally brokered and institutionally entrenched, self-determined antiracist and antifascist interventions will themselves need to embrace human rights languages to challenge effectively. This in turn compels real investment in the promotion of human rights awareness in the formation of politically literate and politically educated citizens.

But human rights will not 'stick' as a currency of empowerment or racial justice unless it can be fully humanized and made to perform less 'discursively'. Robin Richardson has argued that racial equality, in Britain at least, draws on a body of narrative assembled over centuries of antiracist struggle and emancipation and crowded with many recognisable heroes and heroines. For human rights discourse to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



emulate anti-racism's currency among citizen-actors it will have to develop an analogous sense of struggle and its own body of 'narrative, story and specificity'.<sup>18</sup> Of course, this sense of struggle has long existed even if its narratives have been overlooked as human rights struggles because of their non-European situation. The struggles for self-rule across the colonial world were all human rights struggles, and should rightfully displace originary narratives which trace the birth of human rights to the Declarations of the Rights of Man.<sup>19</sup> For postcolonial societies in the global North and South, the social ownership of human rights is contingent on the recognition of its 'multicultural traditions', innovated by the powerless for social justice.

Gayatri Spivak has made her case for subaltern pedagogies to be 'upgraded' before human rights can be properly 'sutured' onto those societies and this is undeniably part of that process. Disparities in formal education between the developed and developing world continue to consolidate human rights oligarchies in ways that will ultimately frustrate real motions to democratise the labour of 'righting wrongs'. The poverties of subaltern education, a 'corrupt ruin of the colonial model' undermine the self-congratulatory rhetoric of meritocracy that underwrites market liberalisation.<sup>20</sup> The world's poorest have absolutely no social mobility, and this is a direct consequence of stultifying education. It's a class apartheid that is enduring and deeply embedded.

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<sup>18</sup> Robin Richardson, 'Human Rights and Racial Justice', in Audrey Ousler (ed) *Citizenship and Democracy in Schools: Diversity, Identity, Equality* (Stoke on Trent :Trentham, 2000) p.87.

<sup>19</sup> Baxi, p.27.

<sup>20</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Righting Wrongs' in Nicholas Owen (ed) *Human Rights, Human Wrongs: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures, 2001*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)p.226.

Her challenge is for metropolitan humanities teachers to respond to these inequalities on both sides of the global divide, and though it is a laudable ambition, it is misleading to believe that changes in teaching practices (in the humanities) alone can bring about the kind of revolution in the consciousness of the (racially) oppressed which can undo undemocratic 'habits', or that making unstable the 'presupposition that the reasonable righting of wrongs is inevitably the manifest destiny' of 'unevenly class-divided groups' will bring about democratic reforms in international civil society.<sup>21</sup> Her aspirations ask questions of larger political commitments to egalitarianism, of objectives well beyond the scope of formal education.

Even so, her programme is, in the main, faithful to Paolo Freire's admittedly more Marxian (not to mention romantic) notion of political education, of which it is an unashamed derivative. Her stress on the pedagogic dimensions of human rights labour is also salutary and a welcome counterpoint to the impatience and occasional belligerence of human rights activism which tends to proceed without pause, introspection or accountability. Unlike Freire, however, Spivak largely ignores the vast opportunities for *informal* education and eschews a broader conception of learning environments than can be encompassed by curricular schooling.<sup>22</sup>

As a resource for self-determined antiracist and antifascist interventions, political education therefore also demands proper attention to diversity and everyday

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.178.

<sup>22</sup> A comprehensive but by no means exhaustive list of possible environments can be found in 'Towards A Pedagogy Of Human Rights Education', International Consultation on the Pedagogical Foundations of Human Rights Education. Available at: <<http://www.phre.org>> Accessed: March 2004.

opportunities for expressions of secularity and emerging secular identities. This connects back to the point made earlier about the desirability of critical traffic between politics and culture. Academic labour takes place in a singular and conspicuous strategic location between communities and governments which it cannot afford to ignore for its own legitimacy to either constituency. I think a lot of theoretical work needs to go into building upon empirical models of communal interdependence (such as Ashutosh Varshney's *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*) to bring these bear onto diverse multicultural societies.

A further academic imperative is to relate innovations in the 'transitional public sphere' back to grassroots antiracist politics, in order to better understand the long-term effects of straddling the mainstream and alternative spheres on the radicalisation of minority politics. These have been the first sustained associations with the mainstream legal and political systems from the racial equality struggle in Britain, and as such will lay down markers for future interventions. Only with time will it become apparent whether they imperil or empower grassroots activism. Besides this empirical work they also asks for the creation of new antiracist imaginaries that can theoretically unify cultural, political and legal agency, of which this thesis is a tentative attempt. Equally, they herald dissenting imaginaries which can provocatively interrogate how prosecuting racial justice through universal languages of human rights delimits the scope of activist invention. In what ways does institutional political dialogue compromise or co-opt antiracism within the system? How will the spontaneity, autonomy, independence and individuality of

citizen action be interrupted by the institutional proximity of antiracist movements  
.with the political establishment?

The tension between creativity and conformity is a begged question not only of the transnational public sphere but also of political education grounded in human rights literacy as a larger project. Creativity cannot be underestimated either as a mark of individuation or as a resource for resistance. Despite the specificity and concentration brought by human rights to struggles against human violation, the risk arising from moving beyond 'resistance to proposal' is of collapsing the diversity of civil society actors into a monotone (if singular) expression.

The time has come to retire the political deadweights of liberal multiculturalism and secularism. For too long they have limited the diversity of secular actors, preserved conservative political cultures and denied potential sources of antiracist capital. They have only succeeded in handing the initiative to racist and fascist regimes and cultures, putting those who seek racial justice on the back foot. When that happens, antiracism and human rights cultures will finally come of age.

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